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PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

MAY 08

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MAFIA 2

The ONLY complete inside story on the next great mob game

+

Grand Theft Auto IV

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 6 (May 2008)

Explosive Revelations

MAFIA

REVIEWED

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

Rainbow Six Vegas 2

Dark Sector

MLB 08: The Show

PS3: 2009 AND BEYOND!

Gaming's top analyst reveals our platform's future

COMING TO PS3

IRON MAN

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

THIS IS VEGAS

C&C: RED ALERT 3

58 PSP GAMES

In our cut-out-and-keep PSP '08 GAME PLANNER

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

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They just don't make mob cars like they used to...

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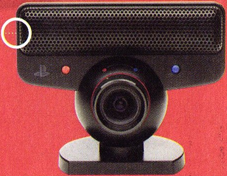
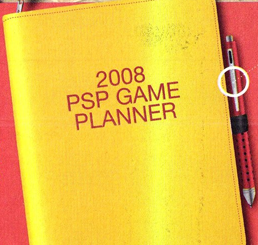
NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN
A COEN BROTHERS FILM



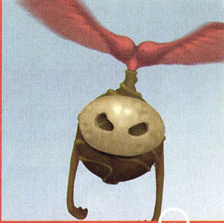
"Eye" want in-game messaging on my PS3. Is it on the way?


2008
PSP GAME
PLANNER

Don't show this Game Planner to your financial planner. He'll be horrified at how much you plan to spend on PSP games!

Sing along: *Iron Man, Iron Man, does whatever an Iron Man can...*

Grab a buddy...well, don't *grab* a buddy—get one before you dive into EA's latest co-op shooter.



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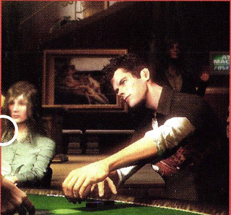

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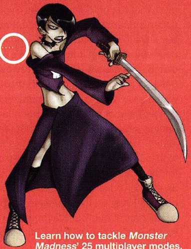


Learn how to tackle *Monster Madness*' 25 multiplayer modes.

We've been salivating for a *FFVII* spin-off for a decade. Now, we give you the scoop on whether it's any good.

Editor's Note

"I subscribe to the law of contrary public opinion...If everyone thinks one thing, then I say, bet the other way..."

I'm finding my PSP to be an increasingly valuable travel companion. Heading back from seeing *Mafia 2* for this month's cover story, a thoroughly entertaining seven hours flew by as I stormed through Kratos' tortured story in *God of War: Chains of Olympus.* While I was certainly a captive audience, the fact that the game did grip me so thoroughly (I paused for just one bathroom/fresh-air-away-from-the-stinky-guy-next-to-me break) from starting until being instructed to turn off the PSP as we were coming into land illustrated how compelling these portable titles are becoming. I'd actually just reached the final boss battle as the flight attendant wagged her finger at me to shut down lest our 747 plummet to the ground. Yet, on finally reaching home after some 20-plus hours of travel time, what did I do? Switched it back on and made sure I finished what I'd started.

I'm heading out again as I write this, and my "what to pack" list includes *Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow* (started a long time ago, but never finished), *Silent Hill Origins,* and, courtesy of prying it from Teresa's enthusiastic clutch, *Crisis Core* (check her review on page 64). I had hoped that the UMD movie market would grow with the same maturity that the games have demonstrated, but a ludicrous pricing strategy undermined that feature in the early PSP sell. It's a real shame as the crisp, high-quality screen is such a key plus factor for the PSP, and nothing illustrates that like an explosive Hollywood blockbuster. So for now we'll rely on the games to keep the PSP a vital part of our PlayStation experience. This month, we've sourced over 50 upcoming titles that prove that there's something for everyone on the handheld.

> "Seven hours flew by as I stormed through Kratos' tortured story in *God of War: Chains of Olympus.*"

The PS3 itself also enjoyed great news this month as Blu-ray emerged victorious in the contentious HD format war. First, it places the PS3 as the most cost-effective, upgradeable Blu-ray player on the market, and second, it guarantees that all major movies will make it to the format, ending the market-fracturing exclusivity battle. The next natural upshot is the PS3 becoming a more vital piece of a cutting-edge home entertainment media setups. We're currently planning stories that will show you how to get the absolute most from your PS3 in its broader entertainment context.

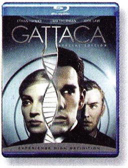
We also have new team members this issue. I'm thrilled to have a couple of hugely talented magazine and PlayStation veterans on board to help deliver the kind of stories you can't get anywhere else. Welcome to Executive Editor Gary Steinman and Managing Editor Roger Burchill—PTOM will be even better for their contributions.

Keep the feedback coming—we're moving onwards and upwards, just like the platform!

Rob

"Quote" contest

Enter to win a Blu-ray movie! Unless you're a first time reader (in which case, welcome) you should know that the headline at the top of this column is a quote from a movie. Identify the movie, send your answer (along with your name and shipping address) to **editor@psmonline.com** with Ed Note May in the subject line. I'll pick one lucky winner at random to receive a Blu-ray movie. I'll be sending one out to David Russell of Pine, CO, who identified the quote last issue from *It Happened One Night.*



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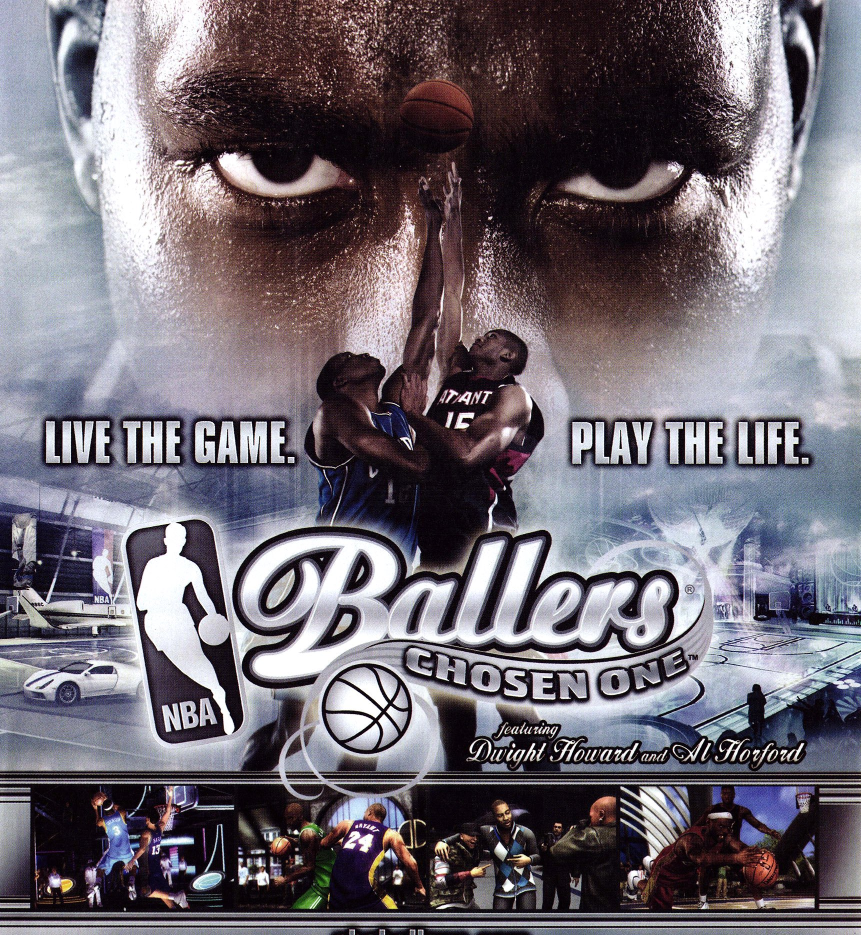

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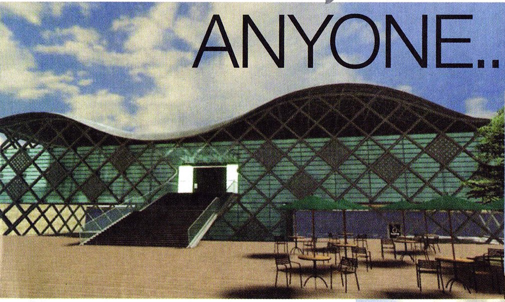
» DEPT. OF HOME FURNISHINGS

KNOCK, KNOCK, ANYONE... [home]

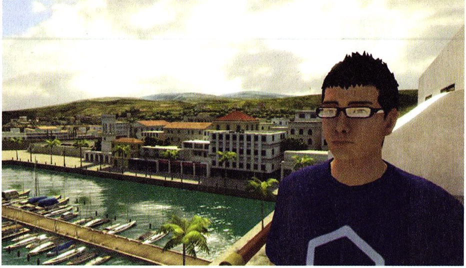


What's the deal with Home? When will it be released? What features will it have? Will I be able to [fill-in-the-blank-here] with my [take-your-pick]?

Yes, we get a lot of questions about Home. Unfortunately, the official answer from Sony is: No comment yet, all in good time. Most of the recent knowledge floating around is based on rumors, speculation, or (yikes) leaks.

But we know you're still curious.

So, here's all the latest data about Home. Just keep in mind that it's all conjecture, and until we hear news directly from Sony, we can't vouch for the accuracy of any of it.

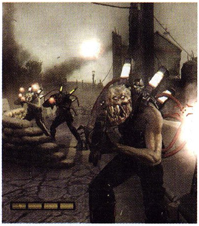


Home's Elusive Release Date

Various sites around cyberspace have claimed a spring 2008 release for Home, but we're doubtful. Consider the facts. As of press time, we haven't had any official new screenshots of Home since early 2007, and most of Home's specific features and details have yet to be confirmed. The only logical conclusion we can draw is that Home isn't ready to be showcased yet—so, we'd say it's fair to assume that Home won't be arriving on the PlayStation Network anytime for the next few months at least. All we can say is, it'd better be darned good when it's finally released!

HOW GAMES WILL BE INTEGRATED INTO HOME

The website Kotaku (www.kotaku.com) posted some intriguing highlights about how certain games will be integrated into Home. They cite an undisclosed source, so we can't confirm any of this. But if the facts they present are true, we're very, very excited.



Resistance: Fall of Man

We don't know about you, but when we're running and gunning through an FPS, we hardly have time to stop and smell the roses—or in this case, admire the artists' lovingly polished work. So we're intrigued when Kotaku claimed that Home will let you wander through *Resistance's* maps...unpopulated. It sounds a little lonely, strolling through an empty world, but they also say you can "visit unseen areas of the game and tap into bonus content in the form of 'intercepted' radio communications between European and U.S. forces. These hidden transmissions will help to flesh out the *Resistance* story, giving players a better understanding of the game's conflict." That last bit certainly makes it seem worthwhile for *Resistance* fans to go explore.

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

Like *Resistance, Uncharted* will also let you explore the game's deserted terrain. But, in addition, *Uncharted's* lobby will also feature a side-scrolling 2D mini-game, which Kotaku claims should be "reminiscent of both *Contra* and *Out Of This World*...full of enemies and exploding barrels to shoot." Will the mini-game be any good (assuming the rumor is true)? Maybe, maybe not. But it should be free (we think), and we never complain about free bonus content. The real question is: Will the mini-game be accessible to all Home users as a marketing tool, or will it be an extra for *Uncharted* owners only?

Warhawk

You know those scenes in movies, where generals and soldiers are huddled around tables planning strategies? According to Kotaku, you'll have a chance to experience that yourself, through Home's *Warhawk* portal. Up to eight players can powwow and role-play as strategists preparing for a battle campaign. Here's the best part:

"Using a three-dimensional 'sand table' replication of the level, *Warhawk* players are said to be able to lay out their strategies in a properly scaled space. They'll even be able to place little army men avatars around the map to envision their formations..."

If this is true, expect to see us hanging out in the *Warhawk* lobby a lot once Home is released.

The Grass Is Always Greener...

Here in the United States, we may be starved for updated Home information, but not so in Europe. Our sister publication in the United Kingdom, *PlayStation: Official Magazine – UK*, was recently treated to an inside look at some of Home's latest features. Here's what they reported:

The ribbon won't officially be cut until spring, but the plaza welcoming you to Home, Sony's online community, has already had a full makeover. When it was originally unveiled, Home's central lobby was a massive space-age room with all the charisma of an airport departure lounge. Now, it's a pleasant, sunny space, full of shops and trees. "It's a nicer, more open vibe for just going somewhere, hanging out and meeting people," says executive producer Peter Edwards before adding, "It reminds of Main Street, Disneyland."

The changes are cosmetic; Home's function is still the same: it's an online world where people can meet using customizable avatars to play games, chat and socialize. But what you see now is only the beginning. Edwards envisions an infinitely customizable world, constantly evolving and changing according the demands of its residents. "As the size increases and more third party publishers and brands get involved, every time you come back there's going to be something new to see." And Edwards adds that there might be a few surprises: "We provide the tools to create the content and it's up to the imaginations and resourcefulness of third parties as to what they produce. If someone wants to create a Moon Base Alpha, then they can." These themed areas could have their own personality, with Edwards explaining that guests to the Moon Base area, for example, could get "robot suits to wear and robot animations to use" when they enter.

But how do robot outfits fit in with Edwards' earlier comment, "No orcs, no stormtroopers," referring to a strict "human only" avatar policy? Especially when a scan through clothing options reveals bits of a gorilla suit. Care to elaborate? "What we want to avoid are people that look like six-foot orcs wielding swords. If somebody's wearing a fancy dress costume, that's a slightly different issue. We want people to feel like they're in a real world with real people. Rather than a world surrounded by fantasy creatures."

Eventually, you could even be creating your own content in Home. As Edwards says, "In order for Home to work you've got to react to what users want. You've got to see how they use the environment and react accordingly. I think for us to prescribe how people use it is missing the point."

PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360 LIVE

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OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

MICHAEL PACHTER

Gaming's most influential analyst weighs in on price, online potential, and winning the HD format war.

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Google Michael Pachter's name and you'll get several hundred thousand hits, of which approximately 23,687 are blog posts from fanboys railing against just how wrong the man is. It takes a certain kind of person to arouse that kind of passion among the hardcore set—just like it takes a certain kind of person to be able to move markets with a choice quote or two. Pachter embodies both these traits, which is why we tapped him for this month's Official PlayStation Interview.

So what qualifies Mr. Pachter to make his lofty pronouncements? Only the fact that he has more university paper than the entire PTOM staff put together, including a Bachelor's, law, taxation and MBA degree. Oh, and there's also the 26 years of experience toiling away in various financial and investment banking positions. Now an analyst with Wedbush Morgan, Pachter has been offering his videogame industry wisdom for the past eight years, enraging shut-ins and moving markets all the while.

PTOM: This time last year SCEA appeared to be facing tough questions about the success of the launch and the PlayStation 3's overall viability, particularly given game developers' struggles with the new technology. How much has that changed, and from a business perspective, what specific factors have contributed to the perceived turnaround?

MP: I think the only specific factor that has contributed to the change is time, with developers learning from their struggles the first time around. It's clear that PS3 game development is difficult, and it appears that most developers are coming to grips with the technology. Several high-profile games have been delayed, perhaps most notably *Grand Theft Auto IV,* but it looks like developers are having an easier time with PS3 development the second time around.

Has Sony already applied any lessons learned during the launch and the early months to its future-looking business decisions?

MP: Sony's biggest lesson learned is that high prices kill. The PS3 launched at too high a price for most consumers, and only the hardest (and wealthiest) of the hardcore audience stepped up to buy the console. I'm not sure that Sony could have done much about pricing, given its ambition to include Blu-ray in the PS3 and to design the console around the Cell processor, both of which were very costly components. Cost of production has come down with scale, and as the PS3 approaches the more reasonable $299 price point—likely later this year—I think Sony will hit the sweet spot of its audience.

Does the continued success of PS2 help or hurt the PS3? With a limited bucket of consumer dollars available, does having a strong PS2 market potentially constrict the growth of the PS3 market?

MP: I don't think that sell-through of the PS2 has anything whatsoever to do with sell-through of the PS3. By now, anyone considering a PS3 either has a PS2 or would not consider buying one. The PS2 is selling well because it is affordable and has a thousand or more games. I don't think that a strong PS2 market limits potential growth of PS3, and think that the opposite is true: All PS2 owners are prospective PS3 owners, and so a larger PS2 installed base bodes very well for ultimate PS3 sales.

> "I remain unconvinced that PS3 owners really want to hang out in a social lounge in between game sessions."

Illustration by Ken Bousquet

> “Sony’s biggest lesson learned is that high prices kill.”

Splits:▼
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Sep07
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STREET JOURNAL.
Blu-ray Disc

The videogame industry in general has often been considered “recession proof” since in times of economic strain consumers specifically focus their available leisure dollars on their core enthusiast interests. Do you believe that’s true, and if the worldwide economic woes continue, will it impact, for example, expensive PS3 game development?

MP: It’s impossible to know whether videogames are “recession proof,” but I think it’s likely that this is true. Entertainment in general is more affordable than things like vacations, and consumers seem to believe that entertainment is essential, while things like sweaters and shoes are more discretionary. Think about it: When was the last time you bought a pair of shoes because your old ones had a hole in the sole? I think that parents canceling that trip to Disney World as too expensive will consider buying games (and consoles) out of guilt for a fraction of the cost. I don’t think that world economic woes will significantly impact PS3 game development, given that the developers/publishers are primarily well-capitalized companies with easy access to cash. Also, games developed today are intended for release in two years, so only a foolish developer would hold off based upon a concern that the economic meltdown will last that long.

How significant to the PS3’s future is Blu-ray now being officially victorious in the HD format war?

MP: Blu-ray’s win in the high-definition format war is a huge competitive advantage over the other two consoles. Before the win, consumers had to decide whether the price premium commanded by the PS3 had any value at all. Had Blu-ray lost, the answer to this question would have been “no,” and consumers who bought PS3s would have felt cheated. Now that Blu-ray has won, the answer clearly is “yes,” and consumers will learn to appreciate that buying a PS3 gives them an inexpensive Blu-ray player included with their game console. I think we’ll see a high correlation of PS3 sales to HD monitor sales, and expect that retailers will begin to cross-sell PS3s with HD TVs.

With game development costs rising astronomically, will we start to see real software price inflation? And if the cost of games does rise significantly, how will that impact sales?

MP: I don’t think you’ll see software price inflation. Publishers have known for two years that PS3 games would be costly to make, and settled on a $59.99 price point at retail. I think this price point is here to stay, and the only inflation you’ll see is a multitude of “collector’s edition” games at higher prices.

For ongoing PS3 game portfolio management, how significant is Phil Harrison’s departure from his role leading worldwide development? Will this be the start of wholesale changes in the games being produced by internal studios with the responsibility now falling under Kaz Hirai?

MP: It’s hard to know what Phil Harrison’s departure means. He was a very capable executive, and I don’t think Kaz Hirai intends to fill the vacated role permanently. My guess is that Kaz will recruit a seasoned executive to fill that important role, and that consumers won’t see much difference in Sony’s games over the longer term.

What games have you identified in the year ahead that will serve as system sellers for PS3?

MP: I think *GTA IV* will sell a lot of PS3s. Although it’s coming out on both PS3 and 360, the predecessor games were primarily offered on the PS2, and there’s a large installed base of Sony console owners who consider this a Sony game. I think it will move a great number of consoles, as will exclusives like *Metal Gear Solid 4*, the next *Gran Turismo*, *Killzone*, *Haze*, *Resistance 2*, and *Little Big Planet*.

How significant is Home to the PS3 platform, its online functionality and positioning particularly against Xbox Live?

MP: I don’t think that Home will be particularly significant for several years. It’s not much more than an idea at present, and I remain unconvinced that PS3 owners really want to hang out in a social lounge in between game sessions. Of course, I was skeptical about Xbox Live and was wrong, so my opinion shouldn’t matter too much.

How do you feel ongoing game publisher consolidation (Acti-Viven-Blizz and EA’s bid for Take Two) affects the volume and variety of games PS3 owners can expect down the road?

MP: Publisher consolidation is the symptom and not the cause of the decline in volume and variety of games. We will see fewer games primarily because of development cost, with the high cost dictating that publishers take few risks. Lower risk means less variety and more sequels. It also means fewer choices. The publishers are consolidating because greater scale allows them to generate higher profits from fewer games offered.

Is there a particular function, feature, or hardware addition that Sony could or should add to the portfolio that would help sell more units? Rumble feature is coming in DualShock 3—anything else?

MP: I’m not an engineer, nor am I a creative visionary. I can’t really comment intelligently on functions and features that would sell more units. In my view, price is the biggest driver, and Sony will sell a lot more PS3s as prices come down.

Are there any games or companies that you’ve identified flying under the radar that could positively impact either hardware sales or be sleeper hits for PS3 later this year?

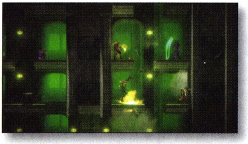
MP: I think that the reinvigorated Infogrames/Atari will likely come up with something, but probably not this year. I’m especially impressed with the growth at both Sega and Codemasters, and think that both companies are likely to produce sleeper hits this year. △○×□

PlayStation Digest

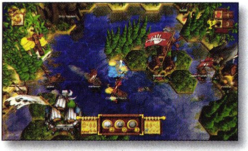
Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities

Capcom's Digital Day

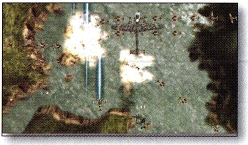
At a recent event in San Mateo, CA, Capcom herded a bunch of journalists into its offices to reveal its latest offerings. By the end of the day, we concluded that Capcom will be serving up a veritable feast of PlayStation Network content this spring and summer—at only ten bucks a pop, too (except for *Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix,* which hasn't been priced yet). Here's what they showed us, and why we're looking forward to playing them.



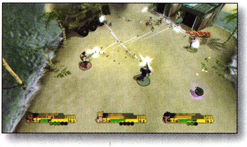
Bionic Commando Rearmed
This classic 8-bit side-scroller has been given a total facelift, complete with all kinds of next-gen goodies like particle effects and environmental damage. It'll feature two-player co-op and bonus challenge rooms. Grappling still takes center stage, natch.



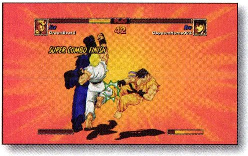
Plunder
A hex-based real-time multiplayer strategy game that features pirates, rum, and whirlpools. The lead designer is Max Hoberman, the same guy who crafted *Halo's* multiplayer game.



1942: Joint Strike
We've played a lot of top-down vertical shooters in our time, but never like this. *1942: Joint Strike* will be completely in 3D high-definition graphics. Simply beautiful.



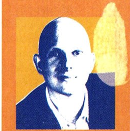
Wolf of the Battlefield: Commando 3
Battling is always more fun with friends, especially when one person drives while two others ride along and shoot. Plus, *Commando 3's* soundtrack will be composed by Norihiko Hibino—yes, one of the guys behind the *Metal Gear* music.



Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix
Not much needs to be said about this hotly anticipated *Street Fighter II* remake except that it's finally about to be released. Traditionalists will enjoy the option to play using the original sprites. Conversely, revolutionaries will want to try out the new "Rebalanced" mode, in which the characters undergo drastic overhauls.

Phil Harrison Waves Goodbye to Sony

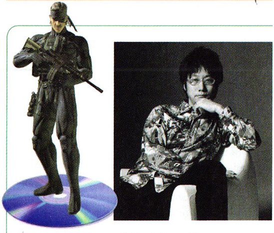
We've become so used to seeing Phil Harrison's smiling mug and shiny pate that we're a little sad to see him go. But on February 29, 2008, Phil resigned from his position as president of Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios. Before he left, he said, "The past 15 years at Sony Computer Entertainment has been the defining journey of my life so far." A few weeks later, it was announced that Phil had joined Infogrames as the head of their studios and development. One of his first goals will be to build the Atari brand into a leader in the online gaming space—an initiative dear to Phil's heart. Good luck on the new venture, Phil. And be sure to keep dishing out some of the most quotable lines in the game biz!



"Nintendo knows its target audience, because it has really narrowed that down; and it's pretty much defined by a boy or girl's ability to admire Pokémon."

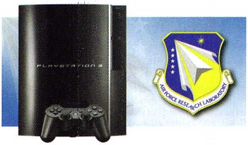
"Nobody will ever use 100% of PS3's capability."

"I have no concerns about the competition."



Does Size Matter?

Ah, the old adage: Size isn't everything. But to Hideo Kojima, size is apparently important. In an interview with Japanese game magazine *Famitsu,* Kojima commented that even a Blu-ray disc isn't big enough to fit everything that he wants to include in *Metal Gear Solid 4* and that he's already had to make cuts. Wow. The game can't fit onto a 50 GB Blu-ray disc? That reminds us of another saying: It's not the size that matters, it's how you use it. But seriously, that news actually makes us happy because it suggests that *MGS4* will be chock full of gorgeous content. The game's official release date is June 12, 2008...We can't wait!



PS3 Delivery

What do you think the Air Force could do with 300 PS3s? Build a flying car? Host a huge *Call of Duty* tournament? Cure cancer? (Oh wait, we've already got tens of thousands of PS3s working on that.) We can't confirm the motivation, but we do know that the U.S. Air Force posted an order for 300 40GB PS3s in late February (www.fbo.gov). The request is classified under "General purpose information technology equipment". Here's the Air Force's statement:

"The Air Force Research Laboratory is conducting a technology assessment of certain cell processors. The processors in the Sony PlayStation 3 are the only brand on the market that utilizes the specific cell processor characteristics needed for this program at an acceptable cost."

What does that mean exactly? Your guess is as good as ours. But we like the fact that our console is sophisticated enough to interest the military.

Mark your Calendars!

Anyone who's ever visited the PlayStation Store via PS3 will admit that, yeah, it's a bit hard to navigate. Once items leave the Featured Items tab, finding them again becomes a tricky task. Luckily, in April (probably right around the time you read this), the PlayStation Store is scheduled to be overhauled with a friendlier interface, shaped by consumer feedback. We're excited. Maybe now, finding that old *Uncharted* theme won't feel like a game of cat and mouse.

In case you didn't know, we find the DualShock 3 rather sexy. We're guessing you do, too. So consider this a reminder that, come April 15, you'll be able to purchase one for $54.99.

Game and Talk at the Same Time!

While there hasn't been an official announcement yet, enough hints have trickled in for us to believe that PS3 in-game messaging capability is just around the corner. First, a note showed up on the official U.S. PlayStation Network website claiming you'll soon be able to "talk to others during gameplay, say hello anytime you're online or have a video chat with an Eye camera, USB camera or headset." (The note was subsequently removed.) And now, Ray Maguire from SCE UK let slip in an interview with ***MCV*** that their "momentum will continue with the introduction of in-game communication in the summer, firmware update 2.4..." While we can't hammer down any precise dates, we'd say that's a pretty good indication that in-game messaging is definitely on its way.

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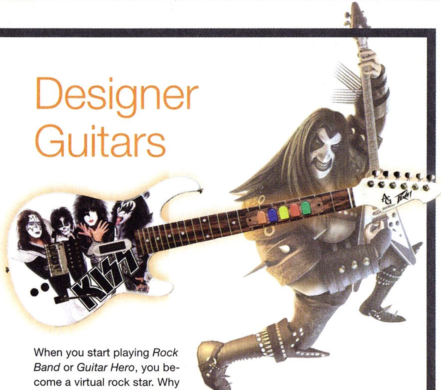
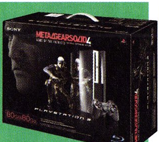
Designer Guitars



When you start playing *Rock Band* or *Guitar Hero*, you become a virtual rock star. Why stop there? You might as well take the next step and customize your guitar controller with your very own design. At www.peavey.com, you can upload images and plant them onto an AG RiffMaster Guitar Controller, a life-size Peavey guitar modified so you can use it with your PS2. If you're not the artsy type, you can check out one of 11 exclusive premade artwork designs, including images featuring KISS, Pantera, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Ozzy Osbourne, and Megadeth.

Bundles of Joy

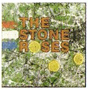


Understatement of the issue: *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* is sure to be a big deal. Big enough, in fact, that Sony is releasing a PS3 bundle alongside the game. For $499, the deal will include: an 80GB PS3, a DualShock 3 wireless controller, and a copy of the game, of course. The best part is that the 80GB included in the package will feature some backward compatibility, to allow gamers to replay the old *MGS* titles, no doubt.

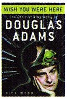
Europe will also be getting two new bundles. The Blu-ray bundle, available March 19, will include a 40GB PS3, a Sixaxis wireless controller, and three Blu-ray films (*Spiderman 3*, *Casino Royale*, and *300*). The racing bundle, available March 28, will also include a 40GB PS3 and a Sixaxis, along with a copy of *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue*. Both will retail for 399 pounds (approximately $800 US). We'd say that we're definitely getting the better deal on our side of the ocean.

TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and absorbing in the world of entertainment this month.



The Stone Roses | Music | Price: $13
Proving just how far his finger is from the pulse of music, Rob just recently discovered The Stone Roses debut album. Though the Manchester band's album was released in 1989 (and he even lived just outside Manchester in 1993), it took until 2008 to finally discover what an amazing album this self-titled debut actually is. Next month, Rob thinks that new Elvis Presley 8-track is just dandy.



Wish You Were Here | Book | Price: $10
The Official Biography of Douglas Adams is a terrific read that offers probably the last time fans of Adams' brilliant comedic style will be able to read something akin to his unique perspective. If you've never read *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* do so now. Put down your game controller, PSP, whatever, and read an absolute masterpiece dissection of human thought, the general condition, and how god can't possibly exist. Literary genius.

Help | PTOM staff | Price: Salary plus benefits
For a few issues, it was just Rob, Teresa, and Ken holding down the fort. But now help has arrived in the form of Roger and Gary. Huzzah! Now we can sip mojitos and nibble on ceviche instead of gobbling down vending-machine fare and sleeping under our desks!

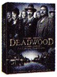
N+ | PSP Game | Price: $30
It might have slipped under our reviews radar, but once we got our hands on it, we couldn't stop playing this magnificent port of the homebrewed Flash-game phenom. With subtly brilliant aesthetics, phenomenal rag-doll physics, and fiendishly challenging levels, this one embodies the "just one more try" addictiveness that's the hallmark of a great platformer. Check it out at www.thewayoftheninja.org

THE WIRE
LISTEN CAREFULLY

The Wire | DVD | Price: $50
Critically acclaimed, beloved by its devoted fans, but woefully overlooked by the majority of TV viewers, *The Wire* recently wrapped up its fifth and final season on HBO. We wanted to find out what all the fuss was about, and now we're hooked on this gritty Baltimore drama. In fact, we've been passing around the first season DVD set while eagerly awaiting our Amazon order for seasons two through four. It's that good.

America's Next Top Model – Season 10 | TV Show | Price: Free
Videogames and high fashion don't exactly go hand in hand, but Teresa's utterly addicted to *America's Next Top Model.* She says watching the girls go from "decent pretty" to "amazingly gorgeous" is fun, but its their pettiness that she finds especially amusing. Seems like a somewhat disturbing spectator sport, Teresa!

Bruce Lee | Stud Muffin Hero Worship | Price: Free
After watching *Enter the Dragon* and *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* in succession, Teresa's been on a Bruce Lee high. She waxes poetic about the awesomeness of knocking someone out with a punch started from only two inches away. We'll know she needs help when she starts gushing about Bruce's cameo as Abyo on *Pucca.*



Deadwood: The Third and Final Season | DVD | Price: $50
As ornery and mean-spirited a western as you'll find; the third season of *Deadwood* is action-packed and edge-of-seat compelling. There have been rumors of feature films that would more satisfyingly resolve the abrupt ending of the series, but apparently the set is gone and the hoople-heads have gone home.

In Treatment | TV Show | Price: Free
A series that essentially centers around one-on-one conversations between people talking about their lives may not seem all that compelling, but it reveals a universal truth: We're all screwed up—badly. Suddenly, escaping to a virtual world to unleash all your inner demons seems quite healthy and cathartic.

Dr. Randy Pausch | YouTube video | Price: Free
Our public service announcement for the month: Go to http://youtube.com/watch?v=_tlyt8oSLVs and take ten minutes to listen to someone who truly understands the value of every minute.

do you have what it takes?
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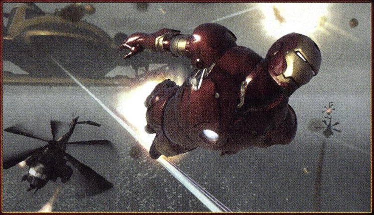
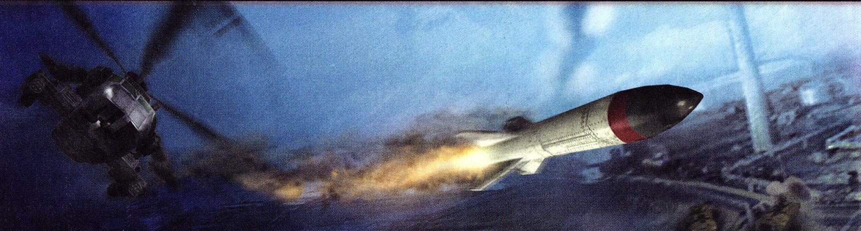
IN AIR OR ON THE GROUND.

IRON MAN™





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Wii

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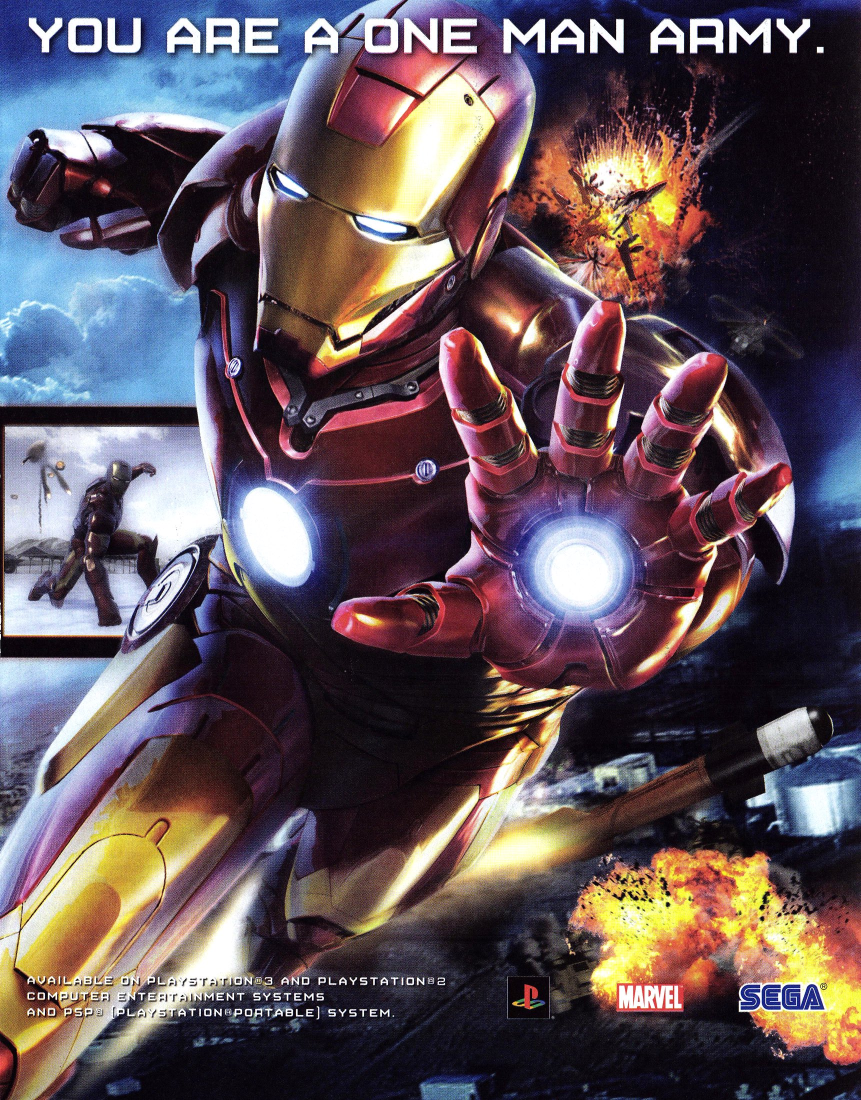
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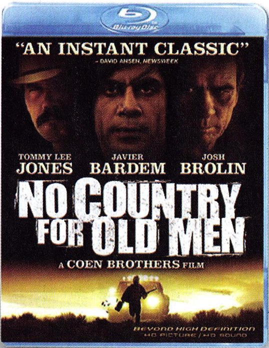
Blu-ray Central

What's new to Blu-ray this month


Blu-ray Disc
"AN INSTANT CLASSIC"
- DAVID ANSEN, NEWSWEEK
TOMMY LEE JONES
JAVIER BARDEM
JOSH BROLIN
NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN
A COEN BROTHERS FILM
BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION
HD PICTURE / HD SOUND

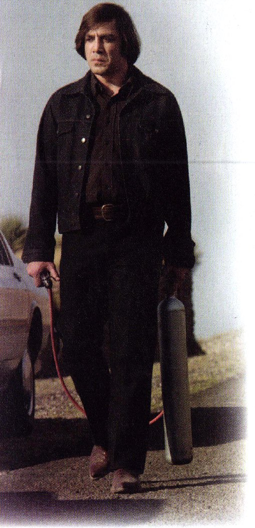
PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH

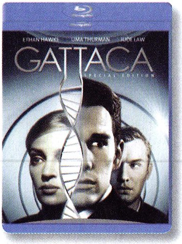
No Country for Old Men

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** R

The Coen Brothers have a sense of style and originality that is almost unique in Hollywood, and *No Country for Old Men* is no exception. The film looks gorgeous; the dialogue is nearly sublime in the way it mixes dark humor, honesty, and brutality—often in the same sentence. The violence is horrific, the characters realistic, and the plot is nail-biting. In terms of film making, *No Country for Old Men* is pure brilliance. Yet, the actual story ends up feeling tragically unfinished. The extras are also disappointingly light, particularly the lack of Coen Brothers' commentary. Just the same, the movie is a worthwhile experience and a disconcerting morality play. The members of the Academy voted it the best of the year, so you're practically required to rent it.

MOVIES ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★



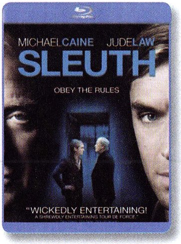

ETHAN HAWKE
UMA THURMAN
JUDE LAW
GATTACA
SPECIAL EDITION

Gattaca

PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** PG-13

Ten years since it was first released, the stylish science noir story and cinematography of *Gattaca* is still beautifully effective. Though likely too slow-paced for some, the movie deftly manages to merge style and substance to create one of the most visually appealing takes on classic film making in recent memory. The frequent use of color filters might seem strange, but the Blu-ray transfer is excellent. The main complaint with this "special edition" is that most of the extras are SD and the only new addition over the previous DVD release is a short making-of featurette.

MOVIES ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

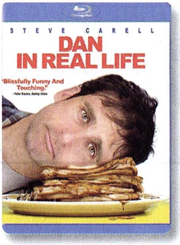

MICHAEL CAINE
JUDE LAW
SLEUTH
OBEY THE RULES
"WICKEDLY ENTERTAINING!
A SHREWDLY ENTERTAINING TOUR DE FORCE."

Sleuth

PRICE: $38.95 **RATED:** R

A black comedy with star power from two generations, *Sleuth* is brilliantly acted with razor sharp dialogue. Michael Caine and Jude Law prove to be perfect foils for each other in this dangerous game of humiliation and fear. *Sleuth* very clearly originates from the stage; it's mostly dialogue, yet full of bizarre colors and lighting, and incredibly clever camera placement. The Blu-ray transfer is excellent as well, and director and actor commentary tracks round out a surprisingly offbeat film.

MOVIES ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½

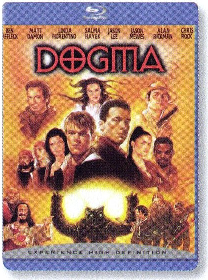

STEVE CARELL
DAN IN REAL LIFE
"Blissfully Funny And Touching."

Dan in Real Life

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** PG-13

Not quite the pure comedy it was billed as, *Dan in Real Life* further cements Steve Carell's talent for affable everyman roles. At times incredibly funny and even poignant, the movie is held back from being as sincere or involving as it should have been due to the melodrama and sitcom-level outbursts. Still, Carell is always fun to watch, the Blu-ray transfer looks great, and watching it with a date could very well make you look like a sensitive guy.

MOVIES ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★


BEN AFFLECK
MATT DAMON
LINDA FIORENTINO
SALMA HAYEK
JASON LEE
JASON MEWES
ALAN RICKMAN
CHRIS ROCK
DOGMA
EXPERIENCE HIGH DEFINITION

Dogma

PRICE: $28.99 **RATED:** R

Dogma reinforces filmmaking patterns that have defined most of Kevin Smith's work—it starts off great, but the ending is completely muddled. For the most part, the movie is a biting and often hilarious take on the various nonsensical tenets of Christianity in general, and the Catholic religion in particular. While Smith has more than proven that he has extreme baggage on the topic, the irreverent and outrageously bawdy jokes work great. Unfortunately, when the film turns into a bizarrely angry monster movie it loses all steam and sense. Smith's legion of hip-geek fans will enjoy multiple commentary tracks, deleted scenes, and other goodies, and the HD transfer is exceptionally good.

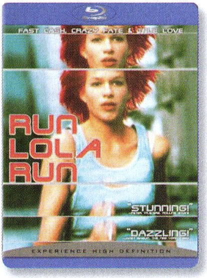
MOVIES ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★

Run Lola Run

PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** R

One of the most mainstream and comprehensible art films around, *Run Lola Run* certainly makes you wonder why the lovely Franka Potente was so wasted in the *Bourne* franchise. Beyond that, this is a cleverly executed movie about a woman quite literally running through three different possibilities for saving her smalltime crook of a boyfriend. Full of memorable scenes and great use of its techno soundtrack, *Lola* looks surprisingly sharp overall in HD.

MOVIES ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★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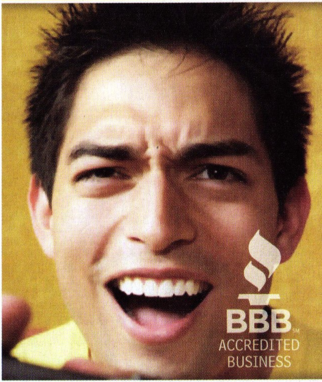
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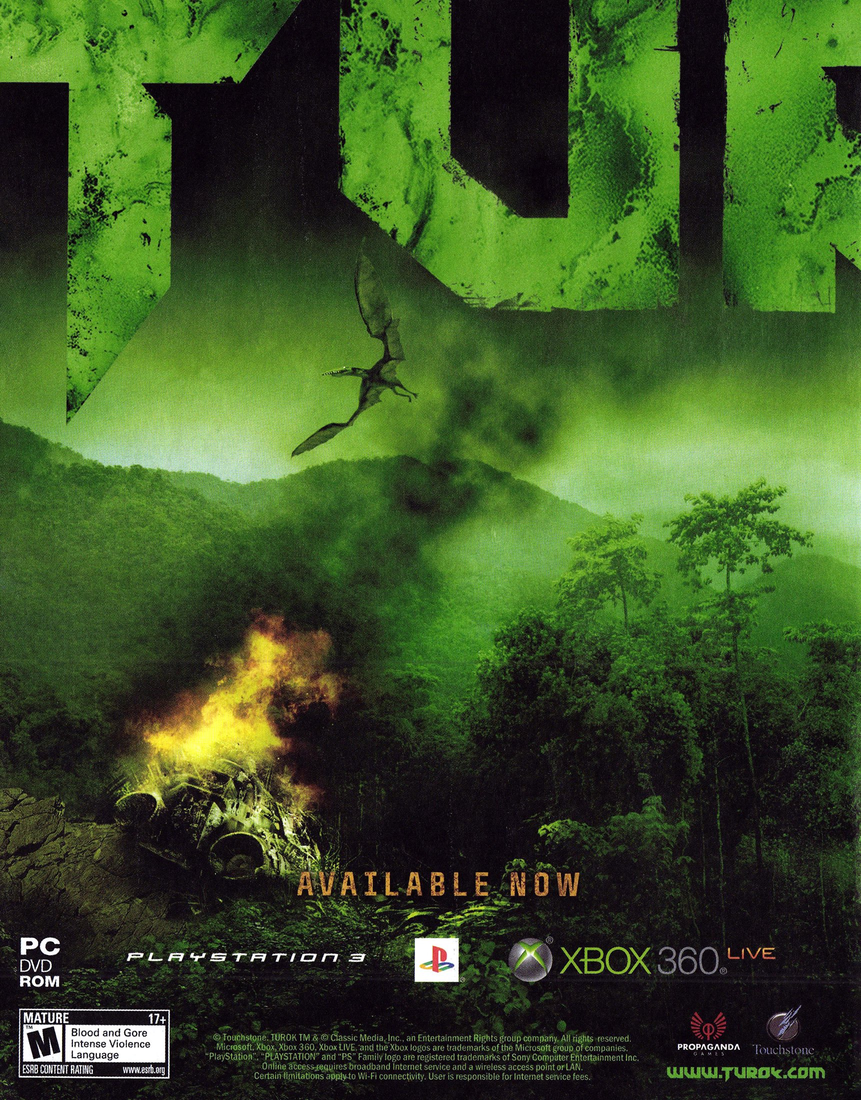
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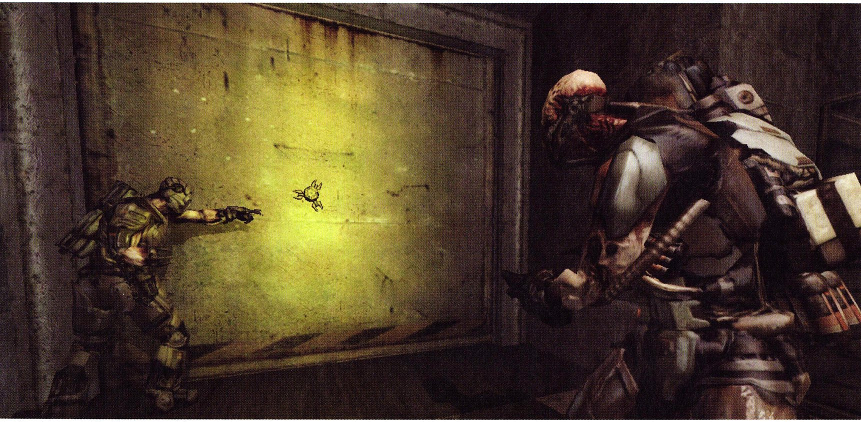


"Locksmith" would make for a handy job class right about now.

PS3 | P

Enemy Territory Quake Wars

Hands On Preview

Only you (and 15 of your friends) can save Earth from the marauding Strogg

PS3 AVAILABLE: When it's done GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: id Software/Splash Damage

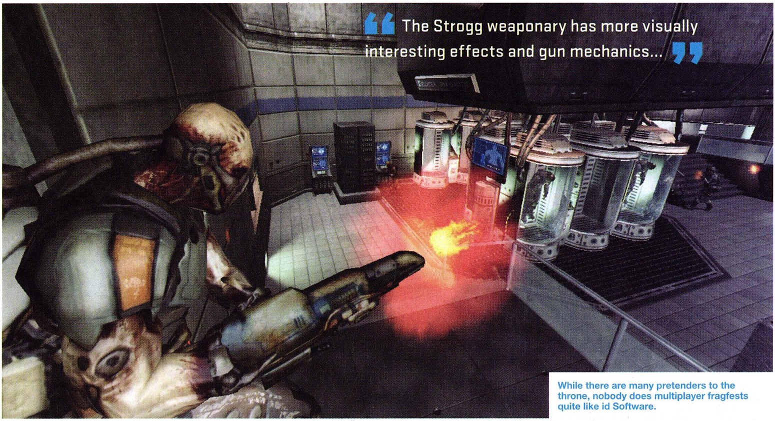
Mention the name id Software to a PC gamer, and you're likely to see a frenzied response of fan fervor. The studio did, after all, create two of the most seminal shooters in gaming history, *Doom* and *Quake*—and thanks to those franchises, fan anticipation for any new game remains remarkably high.

Enter *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars,* which expands on the *Quake* storyline while taking the gameplay into the current vogue format of large-scale team-focused and objective-based online battles. Upon its release on PC in October 2007, the critical reaction was extremely positive. Soon enough PlayStation 3 gamers will get a chance to see what all the fuss is about—although when, exactly, is still to be determined thanks to id's perpetual "when it's done" release promises.

Behind Enemy Lines

The story is set on Earth in 2065. The Strogg (the half-mutant, half-machine alien baddies from *Quakes 1, 2,* and *4)* have brought a massive invasion force to Earth, intent on harvesting humanity. The Global Defense Force stands in their way, and you'll fight offensive and defensive objective-based missions in four theaters across the globe.

It's a solid setup for a team-based



“The Strogg weaponary has more visually interesting effects and gun mechanics...”

While there are many pretenders to the throne, nobody does multiplayer fragfests quite like id Software.

online experience, but you can also play through all 12 maps in a single-player form, working with AI squadmates to attain your goals. That's handy to familiarize yourself with the class system, objective styles, and arsenal of weapons and gadgets before you join the masses online.

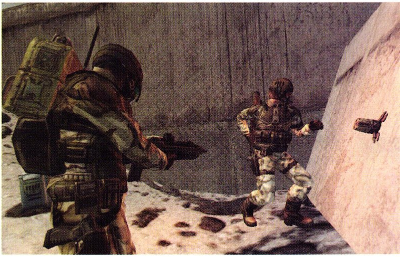
Each of the two sides has five classes, and objectives scattered throughout the maps will require the specific skills of a certain class. (At the character select screen—called the “Limbo Menu”—you'll be able to see the number of players in each job, and a star indicates which class is required to complete the current objective.) These classes cover the usual suspects of Soldier, Spy, Medic, Field Ops, and Engineer (with Aggressor, Infiltrator, Technician, Oppressor, and Constructor their Strogg counterparts) and each come equipped with specialist gear that'll allow them to disable shields and turrets, heal downed comrades, or call in powerful strategic strikes on a specific target.

Of course, they all carry weaponry of varying strengths and effects. From what we saw, the Strogg weaponry has more visually interesting effects and gun mechanics than the generic GDF space marine hardware. But overall, the visual quality of the maps, items, characters, and vehicles was outstanding. We didn't observe any significant pop-up of items or objects, and battlefield effects like explosions were suitably, well, fiery.

The development studio formerly known as Z-Axis (responsible for, sadly, *BMX XXX,* among other things, before being renamed and consumed into the Activision family) is working on the PS3 port. While it appears extremely faithful to the big PC brother (all the maps, classes, and game modes are present), it is a straight port. No additional maps, modes, or other enhancements will make this release, despite it arriving at least nine months after the PC launch. Id Software's Kevin Cloud did tell us that a couple of lessons learned from the post-release community feedback have been incorporated under the hood. “We've tweaked the way weapons and turrets work,” he told us, “and changed some of the objective timings a little.” The controls (use L2 to zoom in and R2 to shoot, for example) are also pick-up-and-get-firing easy—always a good thing when making the transition from PC keyboards to PS3 controllers.

No Allies? No Problem!

What gives *Enemy Territory* broader playability are the AI bots; thanks to them, you won't have to wait until all your friends are available to jump in a game. In the online mode you can enter the fray with, say, four friends, and have the other spots (up to 16 players total) filled with bots.

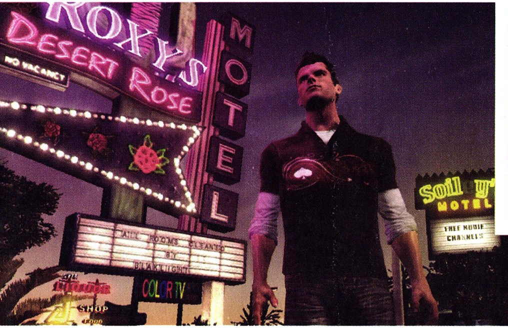


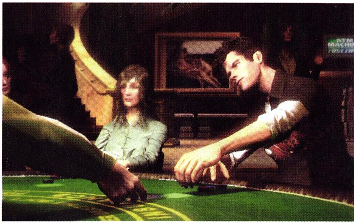
“You open it.”
“I'm not going to open it, you open it.”
“No, really, you open it...”

Though we weren't able to see the PS3's online matchmaking in action, we're told it will try to bring like-skilled players together—a key feature of any online game. An organization system for communicating quickly with friends to get into a game has yet to be seamlessly integrated on the platform, though we expect Home to go a long way to easing that passage.

Rob Smith

Sad, but true: A PTOM staffer had to quit playing *Quake II* completely because he spent more time with the game than with his wife.





"Advantage Play" involves using special shades and a marked deck; while you're wearing the shades, you'll see hidden markings on the cards that give an indication of the possible numerical range of each unseen card.

Reaction from pit bosses and casino security to your various shenanigans depends on the classiness of the joint. Best just to not get caught.

This Is Vegas

First Look Preview

MGM Grand Theft Auto

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Q4 2008 **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Midway **DEVELOPER:** Surreal Software

A project like *This is Vegas* makes you wonder if (and/or secretly hope that) Midway, as an entity, has finally gone completely off the rails. The game has so many levels of promise, weirdness, and wrongness that it's a bit of challenge to even describe it in one shot. That being said, here goes:

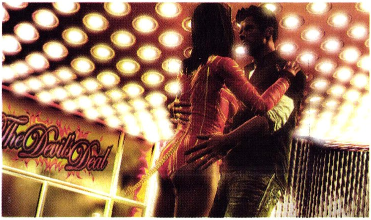
Imagine a loosely *GTA*-inspired, open-world sandbox videogame parody of the most stereotyped impressions of Las Vegas (that of the "what happens in, stays in" infamy), cast as a cartoonish, comedic, morally flip-flopped parable of post-Giuliani Times Square cultural cleansing—with an "M" rating. Developed by the guys who made *The Suffering: Ties that Bind,* and written by an editor from Cracked.com. Yeah, bet that description doesn't make the back of box copy.

You'll take the role of a fast-and-loose gambler/party boy who rolls into town with fifty bucks in his pocket and a head full of ambition, clichés, and vice-waiting-to-happen. Here's the deal: Seems an influential fast-food magnate named Preston Boyer is on a mega-corporate mission to transform Sin City's hornet's nest of strip clubs, anything-goes hotels, and fleecing gambling dens into—the horror!—a legitimate, de-raunched, halfway family-friendly tourist destination. Your ultimate goal? Stop the villains while Vegas still has one watt-hour of old-school, Rat Pack-era sleaze left on the Strip!

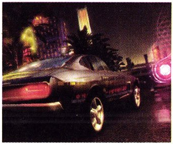
(Yes—fundamentally, it's bass-ackward wrong, from the ground up...but just roll with us, here).

The most compelling aspect of the game is the world itself—a cartoonish, color-saturated, and decidedly recognizable tweak on Las Vegas in general, the Strip in particular, and some of its most iconic features. The stair-stepped pyramid of the "Mayan" is a glaringly obvious take on the Luxor; ditto for the cheesy, faux-medieval "Avalon" and its real-world counterpart Excalibur, and so forth. Even the relative placement of the in-game locations more or less synchs up with what Las Vegans have the gall to call "reality."

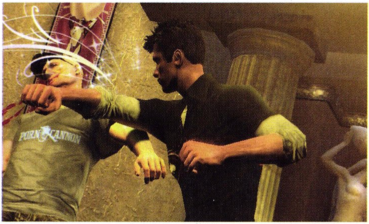
As you solidify your toehold in Vegas and gradually gain money and standing with the gambling



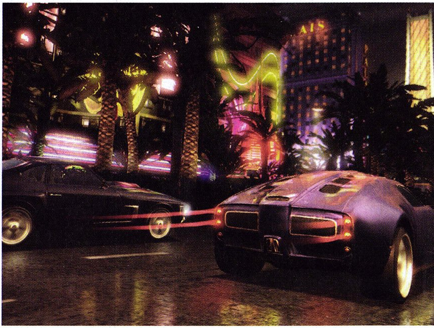
"Hey! Hands at your side. Otherwise we're done with this dance!"



Need a car to get around? No need to rent a ride when there are so many slick vehicles ripe for the taking...



Cold-cock a foe and you'll see some stylish cartoony effects on screen.



No traffic on the Strip at night? Now we know this isn't the real Vegas!

mecca's various factions—more on this below—you'll be able to upgrade your digs from a nasty, Nicholas Cage-worthy no-tell motel all the way up to lavish penthouse suites.

Naturally, you'll also accumulate more cars, cash, and "friends"—or enemies—as you progress; *This Is Vegas* uses a faction-identification scheme that mimics the suits in a deck of playing cards. Hence, the Diamonds are the representatives of the well-moneyed, high-profile, high-rolling set; the Hearts seem to be of the A-list entertainment set; the Clubs are the high-life, high-energy club-goers; and from what we can tell, the Spades are of the sketchy, off-Strip, old-town Vegas. (As with the real city, the game environment can change in a matter of mere blocks; take the wrong turn off the well-maintained, glitzy Strip, and the surroundings go all ghetto and icky very quickly.)

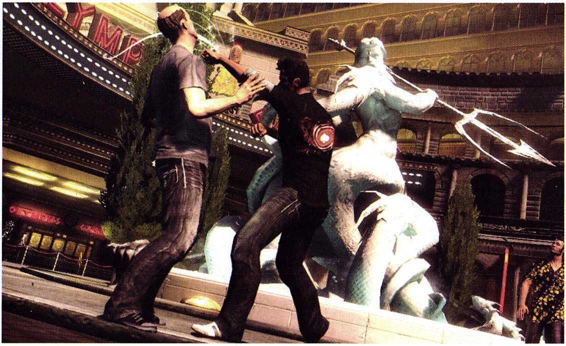
Any given mission—indeed, any specific location of import, period—is themed or otherwise attached to these factions (low-rent crimes for the Spades, high-profile races for the Diamonds, and so forth). And of course, the interests of these factions can be pitted against the others as you take (or refuse) missions associated with them. Initially, the player will witness a visual "draining" of Vegas as Boyers' family-friendly efforts seem to suck the (night-)life right out of the city: If the player begins to succeed in fighting back the would-be sanitizers of Vegas, he will witness a reversal of this trend, with dull environs returning by stages to their former extravagant glory.

Despite the free-roaming, apparently *GTA*-esque stylings, *This Is Vegas* really isn't particularly about thugging it up; the designers are quick to reiterate that everything, even the melee fisticuffs and underground fight-club boxing, is meant to have a comedic, almost cartoonish appeal that constantly plays up the fantasy elements of "the Vegas life." It's true that the *aw-shucks* sheen starts to break down just a tad when the casinos you're cheating take you down the back hallway and work you over…but there's still a ways to go before launch.

The driving elements use the Havok physics engine, and are fun, get-there-first challenges rather than a hardcore sim, with numerous missions and side-quests (including "spectacles"—driving down the Strip in showy vehicles to cause a scene). The gambling elements, on the other hand, seem a bit more fleshed-out. Currently, Poker, Blackjack and slots are in the game. Slots are obvious and Poker hasn't been thoroughly detailed yet, but the Blackjack, with its so-called Advantage Play (a.k.a. cheating) scheme, is definitely interesting.

Despite its dubious "saving" the Las Vegas spirit premise, *This Is Vegas* looks like an intriguing sandbox experiment that promises a lot of live-the-life fantasy fun. It's strictly a single-player venture at this point, but the notion of downloadable content (for new casinos and other future destinations) hints at possible multiplayer expansion. We'll give you the full-review odds on Midway's free-roamer when the time comes…just as soon as we work out a halfway-decent alibi.

Chris Hudak



The fisticuffs are meant to be lively and fun, rather than a hardcore fighting sim. Here's hoping the developers incorporate an "I punch you so hard I knock your toupee off" move!

TEEN
T
Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
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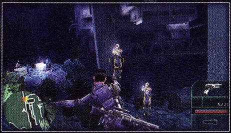
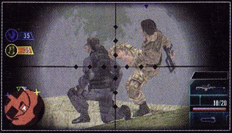
LOGAN'S SHADOW





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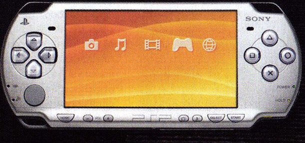

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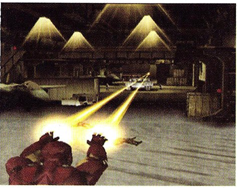


Repulsor rays are your standard offensive option, but an extensive arsenal of short- and long-range attacks are also available.

The between-mission cinematics—at least the ones we've seen so far—are high quality and voiced by the actual film cast (including Robert Downey Jr. as Stark/Iron Man, Terrence Howard as James Rhodes, Gwyneth Paltrow as Virginia "Pepper" Potts, and Jeff Bridges as the manipulative Obadiah Stane/Iron Monger).

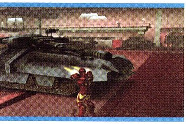
Iron Man

First Look Preview

PS3 | P
PS2 | P
PSP | P

To Wong Chu, Thanks for Everything

PS3/PS2/PSP AVAILABLE: May 2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Secret Level



The PS2 version's slightly more amenable difficulty level may skew it toward younger or less-hardcore gamers.

We used to have the comic book warlord Wong Chu to thank for the emergence of Iron Man (back in the superhero's original anti-communist, Vietnam-era days). However, the origin-story of old Shellhead has undergone the occasional revamp over the years to better resonate with contemporary audiences (after the Vietnam thing, for example, it became the Gulf War for a while). In Sega's forthcoming action title (as well as the new feature film), it's terrorists in Afghanistan who capture billionaire industrialist Tony Stark, inadvertently causing the rise of Iron Man, and they are the first (of many) to get his big metal American boot stomped in their asses.

The phrase "movie-license game" is often reason enough for gamers to shudder, roll their eyes or throw their hands up in despair—but *Iron Man* has every indication of being one of those happy special exceptions to a depressing general rule. It's an extremely free-roaming action title that looks like it'll easily stand on its own as a game, even if you don't know or care the first thing about the Iron Man character, the comics, or the upcoming movie.

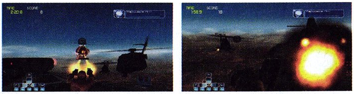
If you do, however, so much the better. By way of a seamless tutorial, you're turned loose—in an introductory Afghanistan level—with Stark's original, primitive clanker of a suit, jerry-rigged flamethrowers and all, just to kick some easy starter-butt and familiarize yourself with the basic game controls (flight/hover mechanics are introduced shortly thereafter). Later, you can unlock various iterations of the Iron Man suit that have been utilized throughout the history of the comics (each one faithfully liner-noted as to its first appearance in the series, a nice touch).

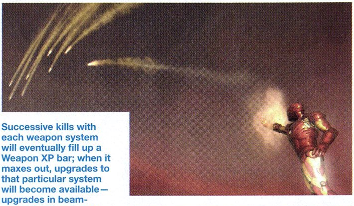
In fact, the selection of available suits is one of the ways the game's various SKUs can claim some exclusivity (beyond the expected hardware-based fluctuations in general graphics quality, level sizes or enemy population): There will, we're told, be the exclusive suit or two that the PS3 and PS2 versions have which the other doesn't (or that the PSP version alone lays claim to).

Sega is being somewhat tight-lipped about such specifics at this time, but we did notice that *Iron Man* for PS2 boasts the singular honor of having the namesake Black Sabbath song actually running in-game, the first time you go wading hip-deep in bad guys (hey, every style point counts).

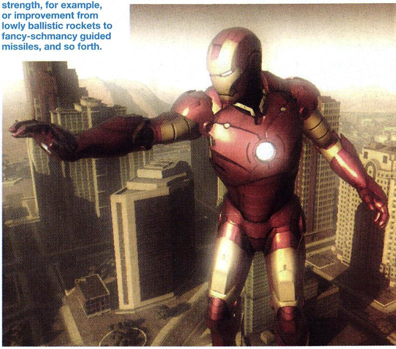
> *Iron Man* has every indication of being one of those happy special exceptions to a depressing general rule.

The PSP version...





Successive kills with each weapon system will eventually fill up a Weapon XP bar; when it maxes out, upgrades to that particular system will become available—upgrades in beam-strength, for example, or improvement from lowly ballistic rockets to fancy-schmancy guided missiles, and so forth.



Once you've got access to all of Iron Man's abilities, you're ready to take on just about anything and anyone (and probably any of its/his friends, too). Iron Man can fire repulsor rays from his hands or—for a much heftier energy-drain—the big emitter in his chest. He can also crank off rockets from his hands.

If all that still seems a little too hands-off for your tastes, contextual close-up attacks let Iron Man do nifty things like impale tanks with their own wrenched-off gun barrels, manhandle massive SAM launchers and use them shoot their own allied units out of the sky, or glom onto aircraft in midair and bash them to pieces.

Oh, yes, midair. The thrusters in Iron Man's boots allow him to boost and hover all around the battlefield or far into the sky. Intentionally cut your thrusters when you're still way up in midair, and you'll drop to a ground-hammering landing crouch, stunning or dusting anything unfortunate enough to be in your immediate vicinity.

The Afterburner function—which you may have seen in the movie trailer—is particularly crazy, instantly throttling you forward at such tremendous, blurring speeds that in the vast, open-world battle environments, it's possible to pursue and overtake (not to mention grab) fleeing aircraft or even, under certain circumstances, ballistic missiles. In fact, the Afterburner yields such instant, horrendous game-world speed that the function is just flat-out, no-apologies disabled inside all the indoor environs, no matter how cavernous and sprawling (and rightly so; you'd only plow clang-ass into whatever passed for the far wall in a decisecond anyway).

As Iron Man takes punishment to critical levels, his armor will visually reflect this with a crackling, electrical-discharge effect. Some other really impressive effects include the aforementioned blurring boost of Afterburner speed and, in the PS3 version, a temporary, world-warping mind-control effect that makes a liquid, quicksilver nonsense of all visual input when/if Iron Man nears certain disruptive generators (meanwhile, a nearly-as-disorienting—but less technically demanding, and slightly cheesier-looking—overlay effect is substituted for the PS2 version).

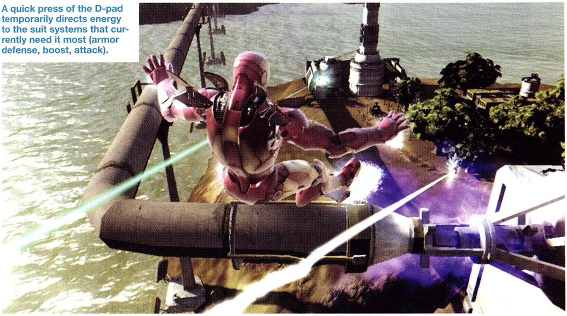
Iron Man has been ranked among the most intelligent characters in comics, and it's good to see a developer and publisher appearing to take his namesake game seriously (if only Batman had been so well treated throughout his gaming career). Shiny iron or flaky rust? We'll see when the game hits, along with the feature film, on May 2, 2008.

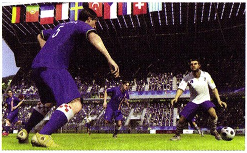
Chris Hudak

In the ultimate version of Iron Man, written by acclaimed sci-fi scribe Orson Scott Card, Tony Stark's entire body is effectively one giant brain. *Ew.*

You're given five reboot heart slots per mission: Should the worst happen in battle, there's a brief, increasingly difficult, button-press mini-game—tied to a heart monitor readout—completion of which will reboot Stark/Iron Man.

A quick press of the D-pad temporarily directs energy to the suit systems that currently need it most (armor defense, boost, attack).





The single-player Be A Pro mode in *FIFA 08* has evolved into a contest to be named team captain. Headbutting ensues...

Opa! Upstart Greece defeated host Portugal at the 2004 Euro final in Lisbon in one of the tournament's greatest upsets.

Fist-pump, cartwheel or airplane? After scoring, you can now choose between 40 interactive celebrations. We recommend the robot.

UEFA Euro 2008

Hands On Preview

A mid-season upgrade still aims for glory

PS3 AVAILABLE: May 2008 GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Canada

EA sure loves to make soccer games. As if *FIFA, UEFA Champions League, FIFA World Cup,* and *FIFA Street* weren't enough, you can now add *UEFA Euro 2008* to the mix. With an average of two soccer titles a year, we'd be surprised if EA Canada hasn't already negotiated the rights to *Vancouver Girls Youth Soccer 2009.*

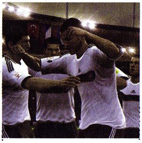
Hey, we're not complaining as we've seen the quality of EA soccer slowly increase over the years and it's finally starting to rival the playability of Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer.* That competition is only going to stiffen as, after playing several hours of *UEFA 2008,* this is shaping up to be EA's finest soccer title on the PS3 to date.

The group stage of the European championship kicks off this June in Austria and Switzerland with the final 16 teams already slotted in. Fear not, England fans. *UEFA 2008* features 52 national teams and you'll be able to guide any of them through the qualifying rounds and rewrite the history books. We've seen this mode in each of EA's special soccer editions, but like England striker Wayne Rooney, this game has some meat on its bones. In a fleshed-out Be A Pro mode called Captain Your Country, you'll play as either an existing or created player for the duration of the tourney. Compete with three other teammates (human or AI) in the qualifying rounds for the captain's arm band, earning experience points along the way to improve your attributes. History buffs will dig the Story of Qualifying mode that offers up situational challenges ripped straight from the real-life qualifying fixtures like Germany's record-setting 13-0 drubbing of San Marino.

If that sounds fun, wait until you get on the pitch. Gone are the slow animations and sluggish controls of *FIFA 08.* In our playtest, this new iteration is fast and responsive—so responsive you can forgo the arsenal of step-overs and skill moves; with studs like Cristiano Ronaldo simply dribble around opponents using quick direction changes. Aerial passing is now very intuitive thanks to a slick power meter. We did notice some drops in frame rate as well as some AI gaffes by goalies on easier difficulty settings, but we can already tell you this is one game to keep your eye on.

Jonathan Miller

Battle Royale



Building on its innovative Interactive Leagues feature, EA introduces Battle of the Nations. Pick your favorite country and earn points based on your performance in both Be A Pro mode or team games. Your scores are uploaded every day to a leaderboard to decide which country reigns supreme. You can also boot up a 16-team online knockout cup to earn even more points. Beware, fans of Kazakhstan. Once you select your team and log on to the EA servers, there's no turning back.

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GRAVE DANGER

SWEEPSTAKES!

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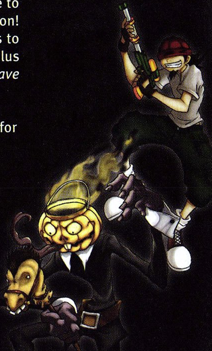

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Tobacco Reference
Violence

SOUTHPEAK GAMES

gamesradar

PLAYSTATION 3

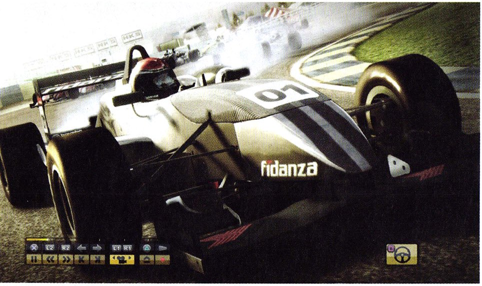
PlayStation Gallery

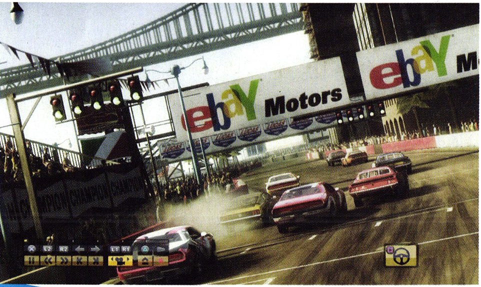
Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

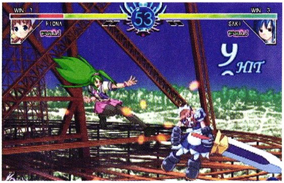
GRID

PS3 AVAILABLE: June 2008 GENRE: Racing PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Codemasters Studios

Developing a game to face off against *Gran Turismo 5* must feel like racing Michael Schumacher at times, but when a developer's bio includes a notable off-road racer like *DiRT,* there's no need to steal a rival's tech documents to compete. While *GRID's* graphics might fall a tad shy of *GT5* on the photo-realism scale, it aims to compensate with a more atmospheric and cinematic flair. The gameplay intent is to avoid a tedious adherence to simulation while imbuing enough nuance and depth to rise above mere arcade-style fare. With cars and race styles specific to three regions (Europe, U.S., and Japan) and a career-building element that spans from rookie driver to team owner, this racer looks to warrant some extended track time. RB







Arcana Heart

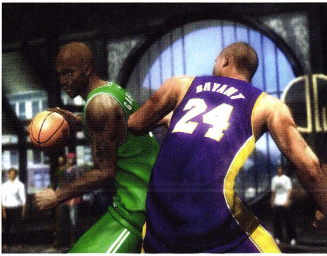
PS2 AVAILABLE: April 2008 GENRE: Fighting PUBLISHER: Atlus USA DEVELOPER: Examu

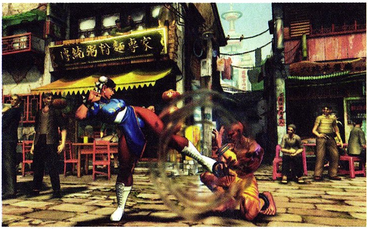
Let's not beat around the bush here: *Arcana Heart* is a very specific game for a very specific kind of gamer. It's a 2D fighter. It's got an anime-esque storyline and art. And it features an all-girl cast—11 of them, to be exact. In other words, it's a niche within a niche within a niche. At this point, we're pretty darn sure you already know if you're interested in this game or not, and nothing else we can say will persuade you otherwise. Just keep in mind that some of these gals are only in the fifth grade, you naughty boy. GS

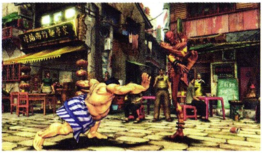
NBA Ballers:
Chosen One

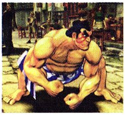
PS3 AVAILABLE: April 2008 GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: Midway Games DEVELOPER: Midway Amusement Games

Caught between Midway's own *Showtime* legacy and EA's *Street* series, the *NBA Ballers* franchise has struggled to distinguish itself in the arcade-style hoops arena. But key gameplay additions like a fighting game-style combo and super-move system look to enliven *NBA Ballers: Chosen One's* one-on-one (or two-on-two) street ball-flavored action. The RPG-esque elements of previous *Ballers* installments are also being expanded with an *MTV Cribs* meets *Lifestyles of the [NBA] Rich and Famous* reality show premise. As ridiculous as that reads, it actually lends an "Old West gunslinger showdown" air to the proceedings as up-and-coming rookies vie to join the ranks of the NBA elite by defeating established superstars. RB









Street Fighter IV

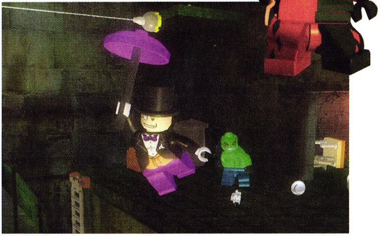
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** TBA **GENRE:** Fighting **PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

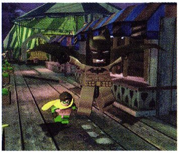
Ken. Ryu. Chun-Li. If those three names aren't enough to get your thumbs all twitchy in anticipation of marathon sessions applying liberal beatdowns to your pals, then consider this: The latest (and long overdue) release in this storied franchise is inspired by *Street Fighter II* and is said to include some of the best elements of all the *Street Fighter* titles along with a few new twists. If the arcade version is any indication, *SFIV* will offer a seamless transition back into the *Street Fighter* world—which, for all you new school fighting fans who don't know your gaming history, is a very good thing indeed. Be sure to check out our sister site, gamesradar.com, for continual updates on the gameplay; meanwhile, soak in these fantastic screens—pretty amazing how they perfectly captured the classic 2D designs in glorious next-gen 3D! GS

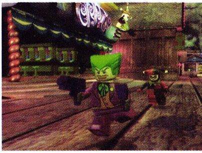
LEGO Batman

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall 2008 **GENRE:** Action-Adventure
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment **DEVELOPER:** Traveller's Tales

Playing with LEGO pieces definitely isn't just for kids anymore. (Actually, was it ever?) In *LEGO Batman: The Videogame,* you'll control more than just the caped crusader and his green-and-red-clad sidekick—you'll also play the same stories through the villains' points of view, in areas designed uniquely for them. We don't have a full list of playable enemy characters yet, but we do know this: One of the Joker's weapons will be his annoying electric hand buzzer. TD



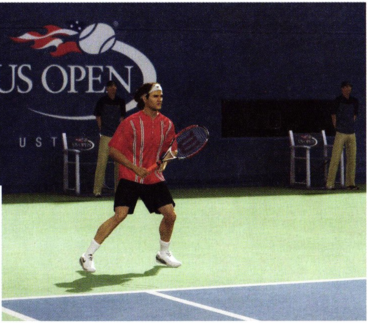


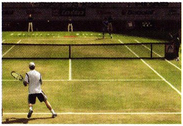


Top Spin 3

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Spring 2008 **GENRE:** Sports
PUBLISHER: 2K Sports **DEVELOPER:** PAM Development

Once an Xbox 360 exclusive, the supremely playable tennis franchise will get its first go around on PlayStation 3 this spring. Some 40 venues are planned that will host accurately modeled play styles of stars like Maria Sharapova (yup, we're sold), Andy Roddick, and world number one, Roger Federer. Should watching a Sharapova forehand not float your boat as much as it does ours, then you can custom create your own player with a broad-ranging Player Creator. Once satisfied, the plan is for you to be able to take your player online for fun and also organized ranked matches. RS





PlayStation Gallery

Viking:
Battle for Asgard

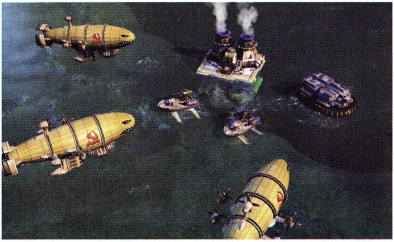
PS3 AVAILABLE: March 2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly

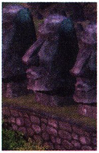
When the Vikings of Midgard are enslaved by an evil power, it's up to a warrior named Skarin to save them. The game starts small—you'll perform mini-quests to earn cash while freeing imprisoned Vikings—but you'll eventually be able to summon dragons (and the Vikings you've freed) to aid you in large-scale battles. And by "large-scale," we're talking epic, hundred-men bloodfests rendered in stunning detail. We'll have the full review next issue. TD

Pure

PS3 RELEASE DATE: Sept 2008 PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive Studios
DEVELOPER: Black Rock Studios GENRE: Driving

Disney's pursuit of high-end game experiences outside its core demographic continues with *Pure,* a new off-road ATV racer for PS3. You'll throw your vehicle around various off-road courses against AI opponents or up to 16 players online. What looks to be an impressive camera system showcases your aerial moves as you catch air, somersault, and perform other extraordinary tricks while racing. The developers at Black Rock Studios are also working with pro ATV rider Wes Miller to help capture the feel of the bumps and jumps. With Disney bringing extreme sports and racing action to PS3, thrill seekers and adrenaline junkies may soon be getting their fix from a new and unexpected source. RS



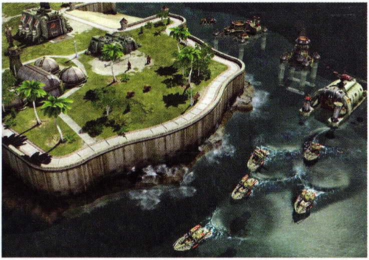


Command & Conquer:

Red Alert 3

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday 2008 GENRE: Strategy
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA LA

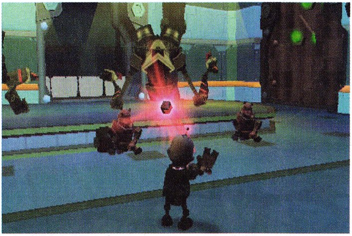
Ah, relativity. Thanks to Albert Einstein, we now understand exactly how the universe works and...heck, who're we kidding? We have no frickin' idea what relativity actually means, but we do know that if the Soviets were to travel back in time to eliminate Mr. Einstein in a bid to win a hot war against the Allies in an alternate reality, then things would be relatively messed up real good. That's exactly what happens in *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3,* the latest in the beloved (and over-the-top) PC real-time strategy franchise, also headed to the PS3. Naturally, the Soviet meddling doesn't go exactly to plan. Instead of eliminating the Allies, their actions result in the birth a new enemy: The Empire of the Rising Sun. What's more, the Allies are still around, albeit somewhat different from before. Which is great news for us, because three factions means three campaigns, each with eight to ten missions. *Red Alert* aficionados can also look forward to a host of fresh gameplay options, including a new focus on co-op play, either with a friend or an AI co-commander. Another welcome upgrade is the enhanced naval gameplay, including the option to build bases on water and to utilize amphibious units whose attacks differ depending on if they're at land or sea. We hear the interface for the PS3 version will be based around a radial menu, which should make for a relatively smooth transition to console control. GS

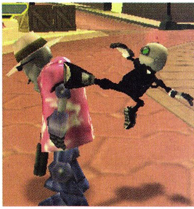


Secret Agent Clank

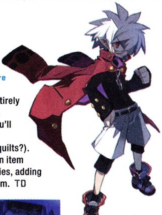
PSP AVAILABLE: June 2008 GENRE: Platformer PUB: SCEA DEV: High Impact Games

If you had the pleasure of platforming through High Impact Games' *Size Matters,* then you'll feel right at home in Clank's self-starring outing. Like the duo's PSP debut, *Secret Agent Clank* sports Pixar-like visuals and inventive level design. However, in our hands-on demo, we also discovered the familiar fun is nicely offset by Clank's new stealth mechanics and spy gadgets. The former had us effortlessly executing Jason Bourne-style take-downs, while the latter saw us disabling security devices with an ink-spurting pen and dispatching baddies by hurling bow-tie-a-rangs. MC



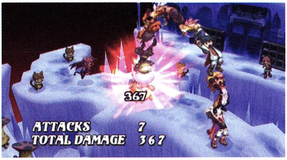


Disgaea 3



PS3 RELEASE: August 2008 GENRE: Strategy RPG
PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi Software

We love Laharl and Etna, but *Disgaea 3* will feature an entirely new cast and scenario. The strategic turn-based combat riddled with insane moves, though, will remain intact. You'll see familiar elements like the Item World and Geo Panel system (remember how some terrains looked like patch quilts?). Additionally, there are new features like the Geo Block, an item that warps the battlefield to let you reach far away enemies, adding yet another dimension to the insanely deep combat system. TD



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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Animated Blood
Cartoon Violence
Simulated Gambling
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation®2

VIZ media

SHONEN JUMP

CyberConnect2

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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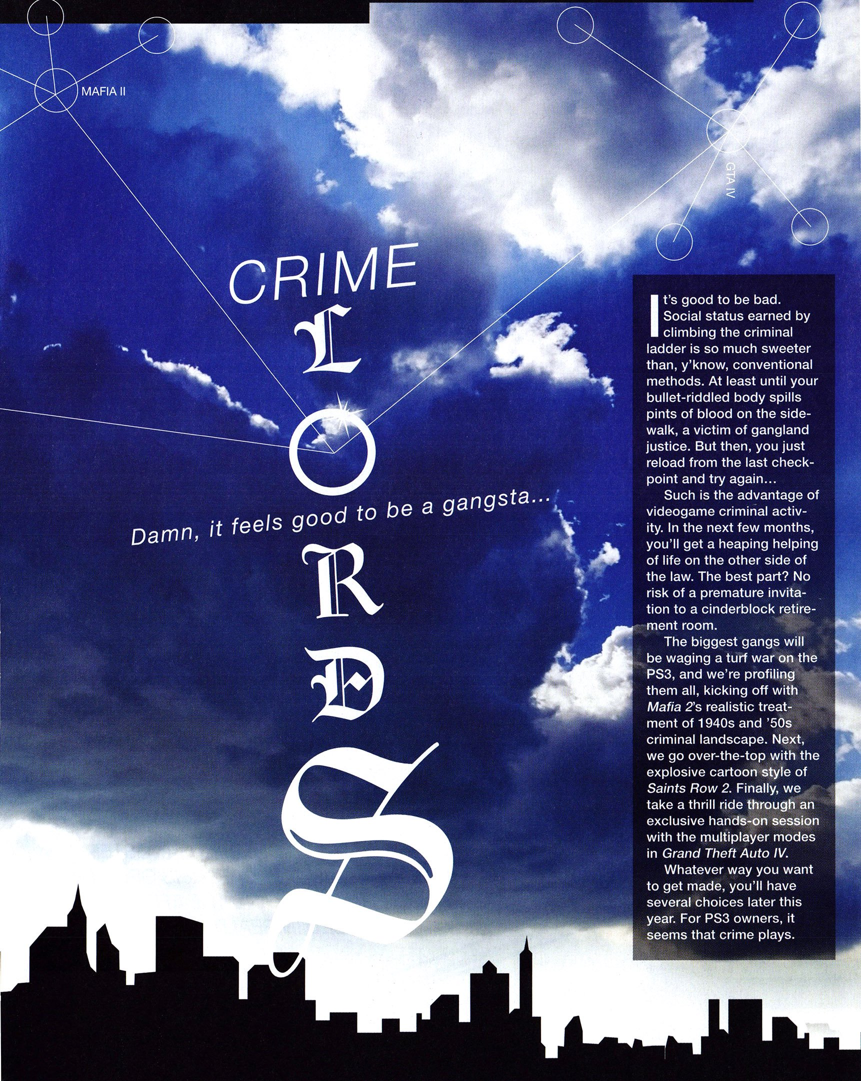
MAFIA 2
SAINTS ROW 2
GTA IV

SAINTS ROW 2



CRIME LORDS

Damn, it feels good to be a gangsta...

It's good to be bad. Social status earned by climbing the criminal ladder is so much sweeter than, y'know, conventional methods. At least until your bullet-riddled body spills pints of blood on the sidewalk, a victim of gangland justice. But then, you just reload from the last checkpoint and try again...

Such is the advantage of videogame criminal activity. In the next few months, you'll get a heaping helping of life on the other side of the law. The best part? No risk of a premature invitation to a cinderblock retirement room.

The biggest gangs will be waging a turf war on the PS3, and we're profiling them all, kicking off with *Mafia 2*'s realistic treatment of 1940s and '50s criminal landscape. Next, we go over-the-top with the explosive cartoon style of *Saints Row 2*. Finally, we take a thrill ride through an exclusive hands-on session with the multiplayer modes in *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

Whatever way you want to get made, you'll have several choices later this year. For PS3 owners, it seems that crime plays.

MAFIA 2

BY ROB SMITH

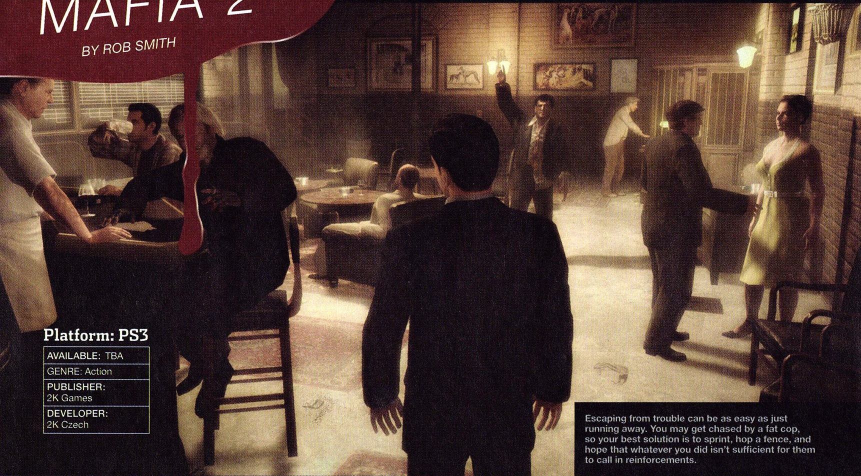
Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: TBA

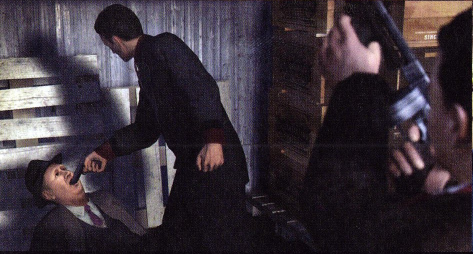
GENRE: Action

PUBLISHER:
2K Games

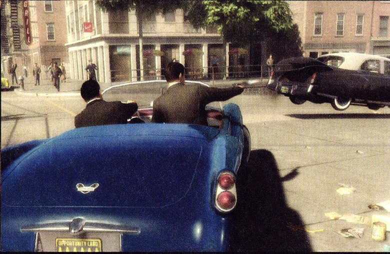
DEVELOPER:
2K Czech



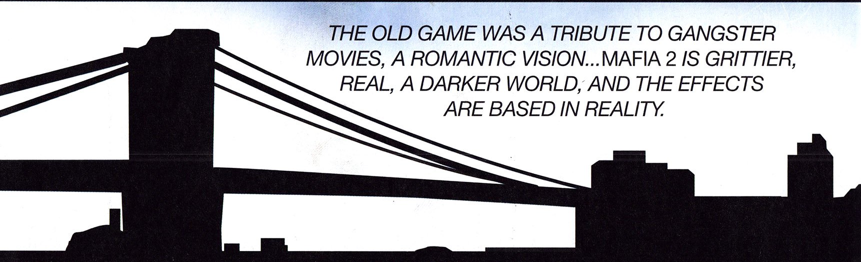
Escaping from trouble can be as easy as just running away. You may get chased by a fat cop, so your best solution is to sprint, hop a fence, and hope that whatever you did isn't sufficient for them to call in reinforcements.



Three different crime families, three different criminal philosophies—a culture clash that can only be resolved with violence.



The studio has its own motion-capture facility about ten minutes from the main office in Brno, allowing them to quickly capture specific actions for the cut scenes at a relatively low cost.



THE OLD GAME WAS A TRIBUTE TO GANGSTER MOVIES, A ROMANTIC VISION...MAFIA 2 IS GRITTIER, REAL, A DARKER WORLD, AND THE EFFECTS ARE BASED IN REALITY.

We're off to see Bruno. Gotta be a made guy, right? Seems every family has its Bruno. The name alone conjures a vivid image. A big guy, right? Five o' clock shadow poking through by 11am. The guy everyone wants to know—and everyone who knows him responds to his name with a curt nod and a "yeah, Bruno…" tailing off as their eyes drop with the weight of the legends they've heard.

Wait. Whaddya mean Bruno's not a person?

It's a place? Ah, I see. Brooo-no? A hamlet secluded in the Sicilian hills, overflowing with Old World charm. A place where La Cosa Nostra is the law, the judge, the jury, and—when necessary—the executioner. It's a place where old-timers lounge around rickety tables, sipping espressos, scratching chin stubble flecked white with age, reminiscing about the old times. Yes, Bruno. You can smell the clean air.

What's that, you say? It's not a place? Well, it *is* a place, but not in the Sicilian hills?

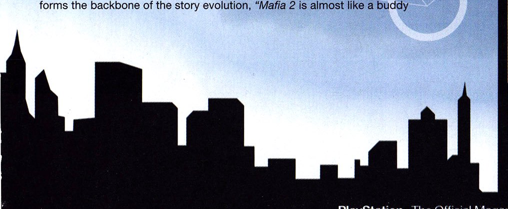
In fact, Brno is 200km southeast of Prague, Czech Republic. Located at the arse end of an industrial park, behind a disused, ramshackle foundry that evokes its recent Communist-run past, is a non-descript office space housing the former Illusion Softworks. Now renamed and consumed into the corporate collective of 2K Games, 2K Czech is home to 140 programmers, artists, designers, and support staff immersed in the task of recreating late-1940s America. This isn't the studio's first go-round, as you may recall (and possibly want to forget). This is much the same team that created *Mafia: The City of Lost Heaven* to critical acclaim initially on the PC, but was then painfully crammed onto the PS2 like a lousy snitch in the trunk of a Cadillac DeVille.

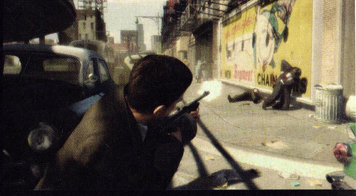
UNDERWORLD ASCENSION

Despite the lackluster PS2 port, *Lost Heaven* was an unqualified commercial hit, with over two million copies sold and an enthusiastic fan base still producing mod add-ons for the PC. With those kind of numbers, you might think that picking up an angle on the original game story would best satiate demand. But for Daniel Vavra, the writer and director of both the original and this sequel, that simply wasn't an option. "The old game was a tribute to gangster movies, a romantic vision," Vavra says. "*Mafia 2* is grittier, real, a darker world, and the effects are based in reality." A high body count is still promised in this tale set in a fictional city "inspired by" New York of the 1940s and '50s, but those casualties will come the hard way—through small-scale operations rather than mass firefights.

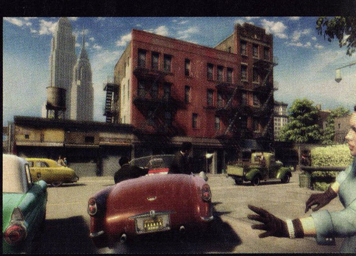
Even though his critically acclaimed script earned him a few awards, Vavra confesses it was his first, and since then he has learned the art of scriptwriting. These days, he's even using the word processor software tool favored by Hollywood scribes. The result, he suggests, is an even tighter tale (albeit 700 pages long as opposed to the 400 pages of the original), broken into three distinct acts as your character—Vito Scaletta—evolves from small-time hood (and war veteran) to a made man brimming with power and prestige. "The new script is way better," he adds (with a promise it will contain a couple of references to the original game, including some Easter eggs, as fan service to the series' devotees).

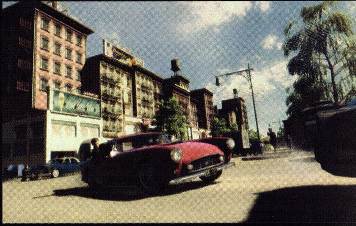
The game opens with Vito stepping off a boat after returning from war—a botched robbery in the past gave our small-time thug the option to enlist as a soldier to duck jail time. In a neatly acted and directed cut scene, he's greeted by his old pal, Joe Barbaro. Joe's the schmoozer, the man about town (but not yet "made") who's had Vito's back since they were kids. Producer Dan Bailie comments on the relationship that forms the backbone of the story evolution, "*Mafia 2* is almost like a buddy

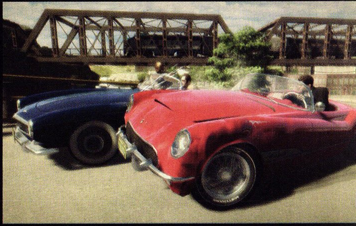




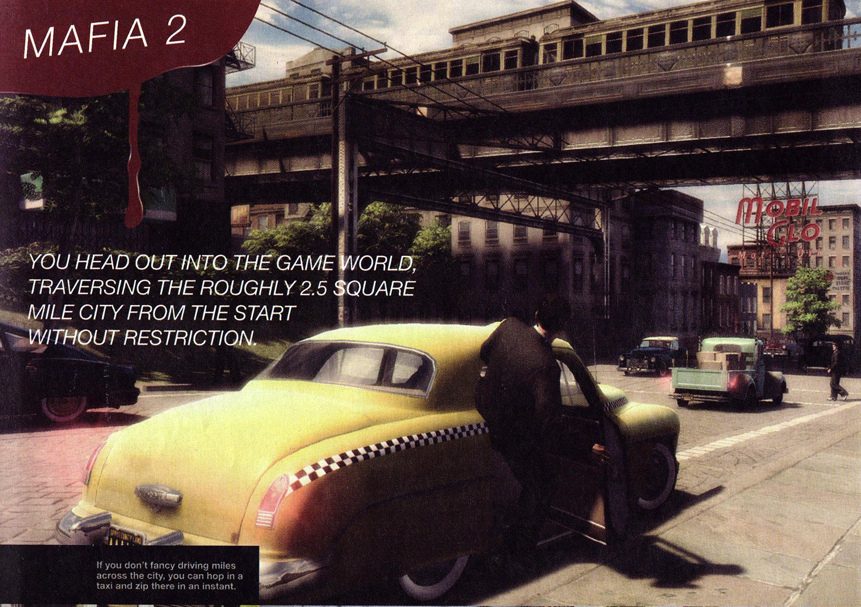
While mayhem is fun, be careful about drawing unnecessary attention to mafia activities; all the families frown on turning the streets into war zones.





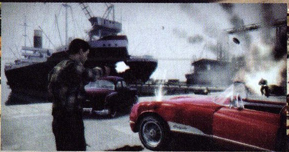


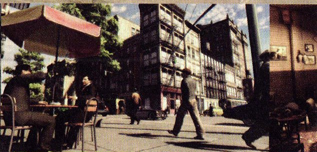
All the animators who worked on the original *Mafia* are honing their craft for *Mafia 2*. The game promises about two full hours of cut scenes, directed by the lead animator, to help illustrate key moments in this expansive story.

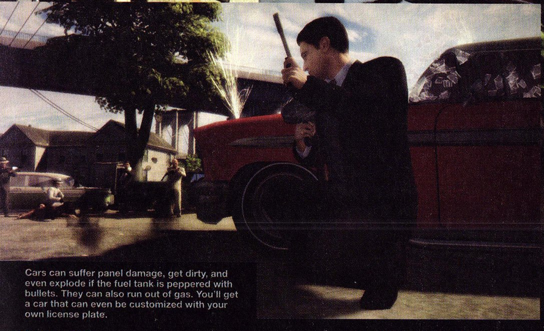


YOU HEAD OUT INTO THE GAME WORLD, TRAVERSING THE ROUGHLY 2.5 SQUARE MILE CITY FROM THE START WITHOUT RESTRICTION.

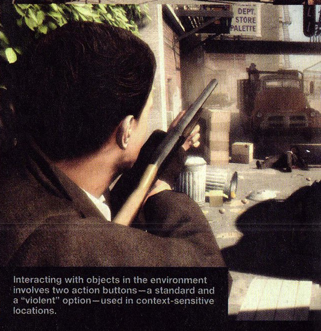
If you don't fancy driving miles across the city, you can hop in a taxi and zip there in an instant.



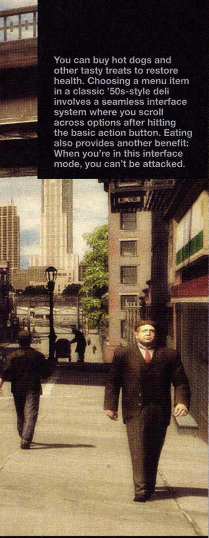




Cars can suffer panel damage, get dirty, and even explode if the fuel tank is peppered with bullets. They can also run out of gas. You'll get a car that can even be customized with your own license plate.

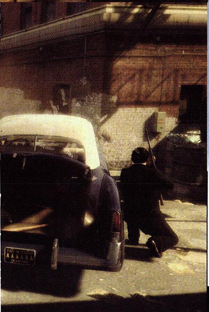


Interacting with objects in the environment involves two action buttons—a standard and a "violent" option—used in context-sensitive locations.



You can buy hot dogs and other tasty treats to restore health. Choosing a menu item in a classic '50s-style deli involves a seamless interface system where you scroll across options after hitting the basic action button. Eating also provides another benefit: When you're in this interface mode, you can't be attacked.

Scripted actions for the NPCs add flavor to the cityscape, so people will smoke, read newspapers, and wait for buses, while hobos search through nearby garbage bins.



movie. The game is a drama, the story of how to get into the mafia, to be a wiseguy, and how they screw up." Those "screw-ups," by the way, will be on you as the player; the game includes several situations where you can decide how the events will turn out, and your choices will lead to one of several different endings.

Vito's criminal ascension starts with Mikey, a mechanic who earns an earful from Joe for getting his greasy mitts on Joe's clean jacket—but who also happens to need a certain type of car for parts and will pay $400 for one the cops aren't tailing. Soon enough, Vito and Joe (along with another sidekick, Henry Tomasino, already a made guy, and the inspirational role model for Vito's career path) find themselves battling with, for, against, and around three crime gangs: the Falconi, Vinci, and Clemente families.

Vito continues to evolve professionally and personally as his illegal exploits carry him forward from 1945 through the early 1950s. "There will be newspapers so you'll feel like your influence is on the whole world, not just that it's you and your own little story," Bailie explains. As you continue to climb through the underworld, the actions you take and decisions you make are crafted to present shades of gray, not just black-and-white objectives and outcomes.

URBAN CHAOS

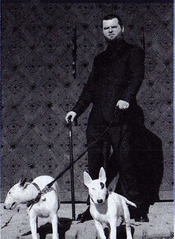
So you head out into the game world, traversing the roughly 2.5 square mile city from the start without restriction. Cars play a key role, of course, and each is modeled after the brands and styles of the era (and they change as the game shifts from the '40s into the '50s). Even the 1940s had some nippy sports cars along with the massive hulking wagons of the time, and you'll see plenty of variations among the 50-some types planned. Like the original game, you'll need to observe traffic laws when the cops are around, though if you run a red light in *Mafia 2* it probably won't result in a relentless chase through the streets, plowing through pedestrians along the way. The overeager police attention of the first game has been tamed to have their reaction more accurately reflect the seriousness of the crime. Similarly, if someone you're chasing commits an offense that attracts the law, the police act without prejudice—meaning they'll target AI hoods as well as you!

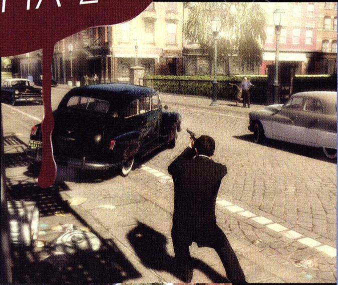
Although it's a fictional city, Empire City is riddled with familiar sights that recall such curiously familiar landmarks as the Brooklyn Bridge and (ahem) the Empire State Building. (Sadly, there's no real verticality to the gameplay, but it was hinted that at times you could get "very high" in the city. Let's hope that means a mission involving some gangland hijinks in that famous high rise!) Under the hood, the engine is able to randomly turn lights on and off in certain rooms, so as you drive by neighborhoods at night, you'll see different rooms illuminated—a small detail but one that adds to the overall sense of a living, breathing city. In fact, even at this stage of development, the texture detail on buildings and in houses (you seamlessly move between indoor and outdoor locations) is very impressive. Colors and shadows shift with the time of day, and the changing weather even impacts the overall ambient effect of a lifelike urban setting, resulting in a vibrant, clear, and detailed environment to carry out your jobs.

From a home base (you'll actually be able to buy houses) where you can store gear, you'll head out with Joe and Henry to take on missions for and against the competing families. Joe's own apartment illustrates the style and interactivity in the game world. It's an obvious bachelor pad with a dish-strewn kitchen, simple furniture, and a pink bra discarded on the bed (we assume from a "lady visitor" and not an indication that cross-dressing is part of Joe's backstory). A significant number of the objects are interactive, from sink faucets to switches (try turning on the radio for a few licensed period tunes) to chairs and bottles (all potential weapons).

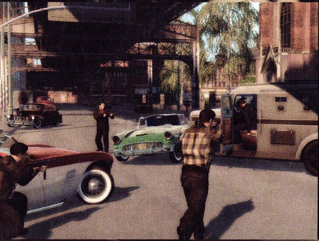
2K Illusion

The Czech game development community is small. A handful of mobile game dev companies dot the landscape, but with 140 people in the Brno office and another 40 in the Prague office, the former Illusion Softworks stands out as the biggest and pretty much only option for aspiring game makers in this relatively small Eastern European country. As large corporations move into Brno (the appearance of IBM, Cisco, and others has dubbed the town Silicon Hill), they compete for the country's top university art and programming talent. However, a fascinating cultural split between Prague and Brno—where to be resident of one means to be the butt of jokes in the other—ensures that the two studio offices remain separate. Those from Brno have no interest in moving to Prague, and the Prague office staffers scoff at the thought of going to Brno. (In a casual discussion of heritage, Prague office project manager Mikal Rybka joked that he was devastated to discover that his Czech purity was blemished by a grandfather from Brno—and he was joking, he was pure Prague!) The studio's first release in 1999 was the WWII tactical action shooter *Hidden & Dangerous*. The ambitious design and impressive gameplay features were undermined by technical hitches and bugs, and that almost became the studio's MO in subsequent releases such as *Mafia*, *Vietcong*, and *Flying Heroes:* Big ambition, bright ideas...home-brewed technology, buggy releases.
Now fully owned by 2K Games, the studio finally has the large publisher management and funding to match its creativity, which should prove to be good news for the development of *Mafia 2*.





To ease navigation you can bring up a map and add waypoints, which also includes the location of side quest options that you can explore as a break from the main story arc.

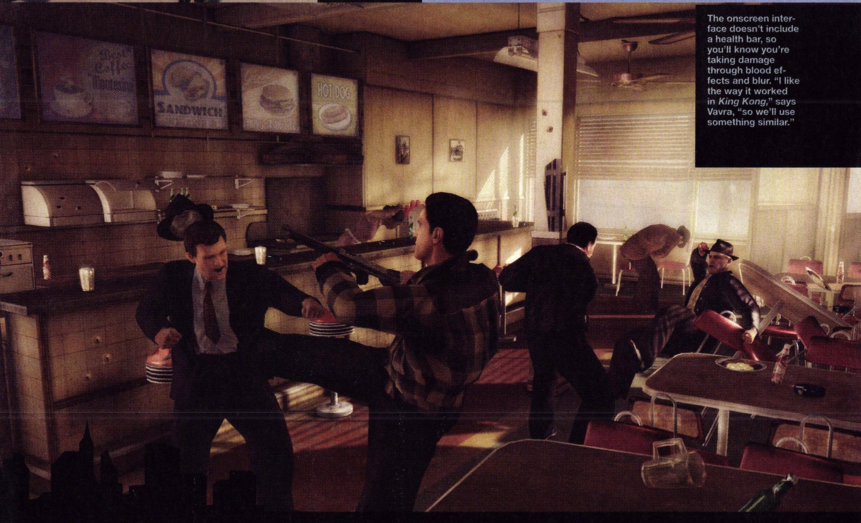


Checkpoints throughout missions (after traveling to a location or before a big fight, for example) are another improvement over the original design.

FINISH THE JOB

Not every mission will involve fighting—beatings, sure, or perhaps body disposal, which explains why your car has a trunk that opens (it can also store extra guns, secreted away from the prying eyes of cops). Still, the firefights are already impressively dynamic. One mission sets you in an industrial warehouse, light streaming in distinct lines through holes in the ceiling. Alongside Joe and Henry (whom you may be able to command with simple instructions like "come here" and "stay"), the tussle against several hoods is explosive and devastating to the environment. Pillars, crates, and boxes crumble, splinter, and are pierced by bullets as Vito takes cover. Blind-firing or using tight targeting to get a headshot while still behind cover are both options as you survey the threats. "It should be possible to shoot through doors and stuff," offered Vavra, though that feature isn't confirmed. A sophisticated shooting assist (along with planned rumble support for DualShock 3) will help you get a bead on the baddies. And if guns don't get the job done, fists are always an option. The melee system is still in development, but it's anticipated that you'll go to a gym to learn new combos to test out on the ugly mugs of opposing family hoods. (The depth and options around these training possibilities haven't been fully fleshed out or even confirmed, so details are scant.)

Given its release date is still many months away, 2K Czech has a real opportunity to deliver a game as ambitious as its legacy suggests—but this time with the polish it deserves. *Mafia 2's* gameplay feature set is vast, its story is shaping up to be a real standout in the crowded open-world crime genre, and its visual impact is right up there with the best on the PS3. It may still take a while to arrive, but expect it to be a tight, classy, deeply involving experience when it finally hits store shelves. At the very least, after playing *Mafia 2,* you won't ever forget who—or where—Brno is again.



The onscreen interface doesn't include a health bar, so you'll know you're taking damage through blood effects and blur. "I like the way it worked in *King Kong,*" says Vavra, "so we'll use something similar."

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SAINTS ROW 2

BY ROB SMITH

Pimping Is My Game

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: TBA 2008

GENRE: Action

PUBLISHER: THQ

DEVELOPER: Volition

Call it a *GTA* pretender. Call it an open-world alternative to Rockstar's magnum opus. Call it what you want, but if you're a dedicated PlayStation gamer, you missed out on when *Saints Row* was canned for the platform, releasing solely on Xbox 360.

Which is too bad, because Volition's bombastic thugathon was a thoroughly entertaining, larger-than-life take on an increasingly crowded genre. You owned a crib, pimped out hos, and blew away enemy gangbangers with impunity. If that sounds like good times, then we anticipate the sequel—complete with perfunctory upgrades to game modes and graphics—will bring out the anti-social nutter in you.

CLOTHES ENCOUNTERS

This tale of earning respect in the 3rd Street Saints gang is your story to unravel. Yours in the way you progress through missions, gradually unlocking increasingly varied (and deadly) jobs. And yours in the way you present yourself via incredibly varied character customization. Speaking of which, you can go so far as to modify your body type (for both sexes), looks, and style. Yes, style. And that's not just an aesthetic choice; the clothes you wear—expanded by additions to your wardrobe earned over time—is particularly important, as it's linked directly to your respect level (though if you played the original *Saints Row,* you'll be happy to hear that respect considers your entire being: crib contents, the lot, rather than just the threads on your back). All clothing types adjust to fit all body types, and you can pilfer what you want from the backs of downed enemies, storing them in the wardrobe at your crib.

Tricking out your crib with the accoutrements of fame and money generates an almost *Sims*-like obsession with these baubles of power. From nine different crib styles you can add upgradeable levels of upholstery and furniture, artifacts of leisure like a pool table, plasma TV, and bitching home-theater system, and even the necessities of pimp-daddyhood, including the stripper pole.

You'll also be able to store vehicles at your crib. Though cars are a no-brainer, you'll have to find somewhere more exotic to house your planes and helicopters—all are available modes of transport to get around the city of Stilwater.

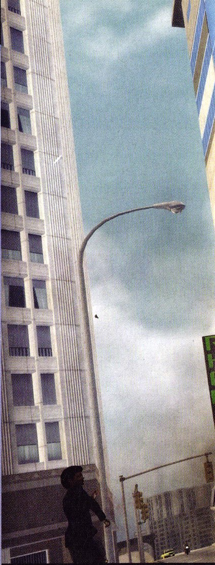
The city will be familiar if you toured its mean streets in the original, though the developers say this version is about 50-percent larger, with upgrades in several areas. Pounding the pavements or careening through the streets in a jacked car in search of your mission objectives is aided by the map interface that highlights all the targets you may have to locate, kill, blow-up, steal from, deliver to, or otherwise just visit. The visuals in this early playable build didn't blow us away, but it's clear that the emphasis here is on fast action and fun—cramming interactive objects, vehicles, and people on-screen at once—and not on creating intensely realistic environs.

A DAYLIGHT ROBBERY

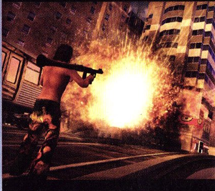
Innocent pedestrians roam the city and react to the situations around them—congregating around a downed victim, for instance, or ducking and running for cover when a firefight breaks out. We're also told that some 60,000-plus lines of dialogue have been recorded to keep responses varied, meaning you won't be hearing the same thing over and over (and over) again as you delve deeper into the action and start waging war against the competing gangs.

In the mission we saw, that involved taking out a stronghold of the Sons of Samedi gang. Barging in guns blazing (each inventory object is accessible on a radial menu, controlled by quickly spinning the analog stick around to your chosen armament and releasing) is one option, but don't expect to make it out alive. Sneaking behind cover and using a fine aim option to target key enemies is more advisable in most combat situations. Just remember that when the proverbial hits the wotsit—which it will—you can gain some protection by grabbing an unfortunate victim and using him as a human shield. AI enemies will react to whomever you've grabbed, so if it's one of theirs, they may pause, giving you just enough time to take them down before they start shooting. This mission required us to blow up several buildings by finding satchel charges, then locating the buildings (highlighted on the interface map by flashing squares), attaching the charges, and detonating them. All good fun, but those charges are even more fun when several are attached to a person. Aside from the animation of the poor sucker running in terror with his arms wildly flailing, each charge triggers individually. Click once and the body flies skyward; click again at the apex of his arc to send him even higher, ad infinitum, until the fun ends.

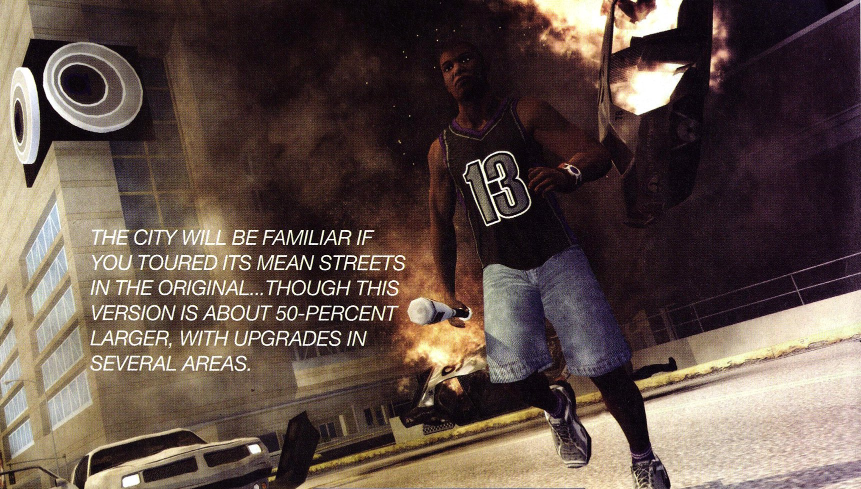
What's all this gangbanging without a buddy by your side? Well, with a comprehensive suite of co-op options, you can play the entire storyline with a friend. Drop in and out at will; the campaign progress can be saved for both of you. As co-op play becomes a increasingly bigger deal, this is a great addition that should allow for plenty of irreverent story swapping of hos pimped, hoods slugged, and green earned.



Each of the gangs has its own distinct fighting stances and styles, as well as specializing in their own businesses. The Sons of Samedi are the Stilwater drug barons.

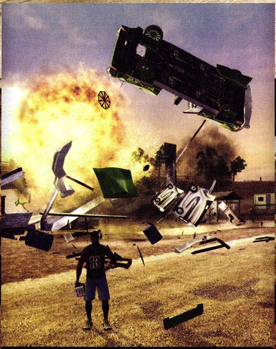


A cruise control option has been added to cars to better enable you to perform drive-bys. Once set, the right analog controls your aiming, not the car direction.



THE CITY WILL BE FAMILIAR IF YOU TOURED ITS MEAN STREETS IN THE ORIGINAL...THOUGH THIS VERSION IS ABOUT 50-PERCENT LARGER, WITH UPGRADES IN SEVERAL AREAS.

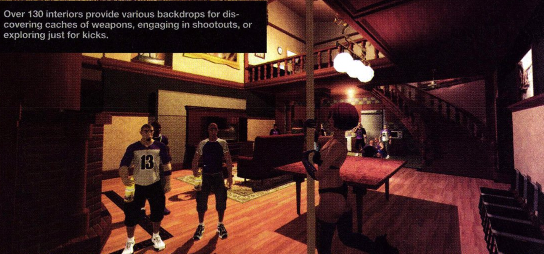
Running out of bullets during a firefight isn't necessarily fatal; you can still wield items like chairs, pool sticks, and even uprooted traffic signs.



Over 130 interiors provide various backdrops for discovering caches of weapons, engaging in shootouts, or exploring just for kicks.

Attach a satchel bomb to the hood of a car, jump in, drive full pelt at a target, then bail out and hit the trigger to detonate the vehicle for a high-powered, high-speed missile effect.

A much-requested addition from the original game: mid-mission save points!



GTA IV

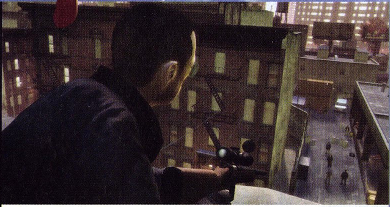
BY CAMERON LEWIS

Platform: PS3

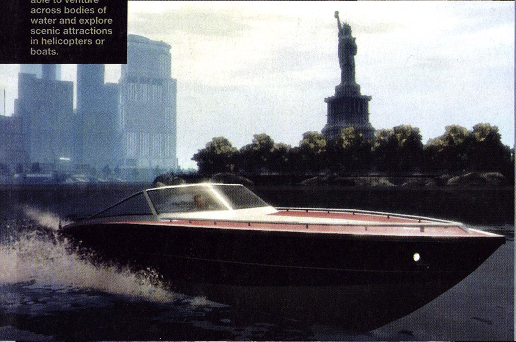
AVAILABLE: April 2008
GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar North

For the first time, Rockstar will deliver integrated multiplayer when the GTA juggernaut rolls into town on April 29. We got our hands on some fresh GTA IV code, popped it into our networked PS3s, and went for a spin around Liberty City for free-roaming urban mayhem...with friends.

► Clicking the right thumbstick zooms any firearm's targeting view. Some, like the pistol or Uzi, make little difference; others, like the sniper rifle, pull you in close to the action from hundreds of yards away.



▼ Planes might not have any place in a city with such a vertical emphasis, but you'll still be able to venture across bodies of water and explore scenic attractions in helicopters or boats.

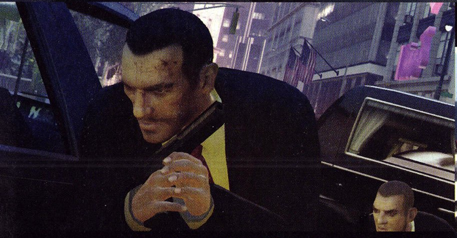


The accelerator is buried, but Niko's quarry is intent on dusting him by any means necessary. Sideswiped trucks discharge barrels as they swerve on the edge of jackknife disaster, and every intersection holds the potential threat of a time-consuming collision. Niko sends an elbow crashing through his window and desperately sprays bullets at his target's vehicular innards as he hurtles down the streets in Rockstar's latest highly anticipated creation.

MEAN STREETS

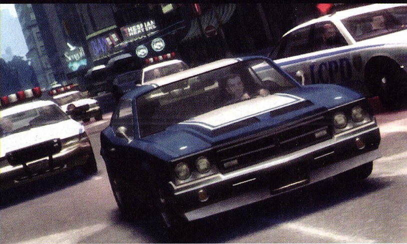
Just about anything can happen in Liberty City's intricate and painstakingly detailed labyrinth of variegated boroughs and alternative reality landmarks, and all that exhilarating freedom is finally ready to invade brand-new online multiplayer modes. Up to 16 aspiring crooks meet up for competitive play, and four can gang up on co-operative side stories. To set up a match, we pull out Niko's cell phone, throw out some invites, and customize our alter ego's appearance. Now we're ready to jump into dozens of killing grounds and race routes that vary in scope from the entire city to tight little pockets of bedlam strewn with a survivalist's bunker's worth of machine guns, rocket launchers, Molotov cocktails, and more.

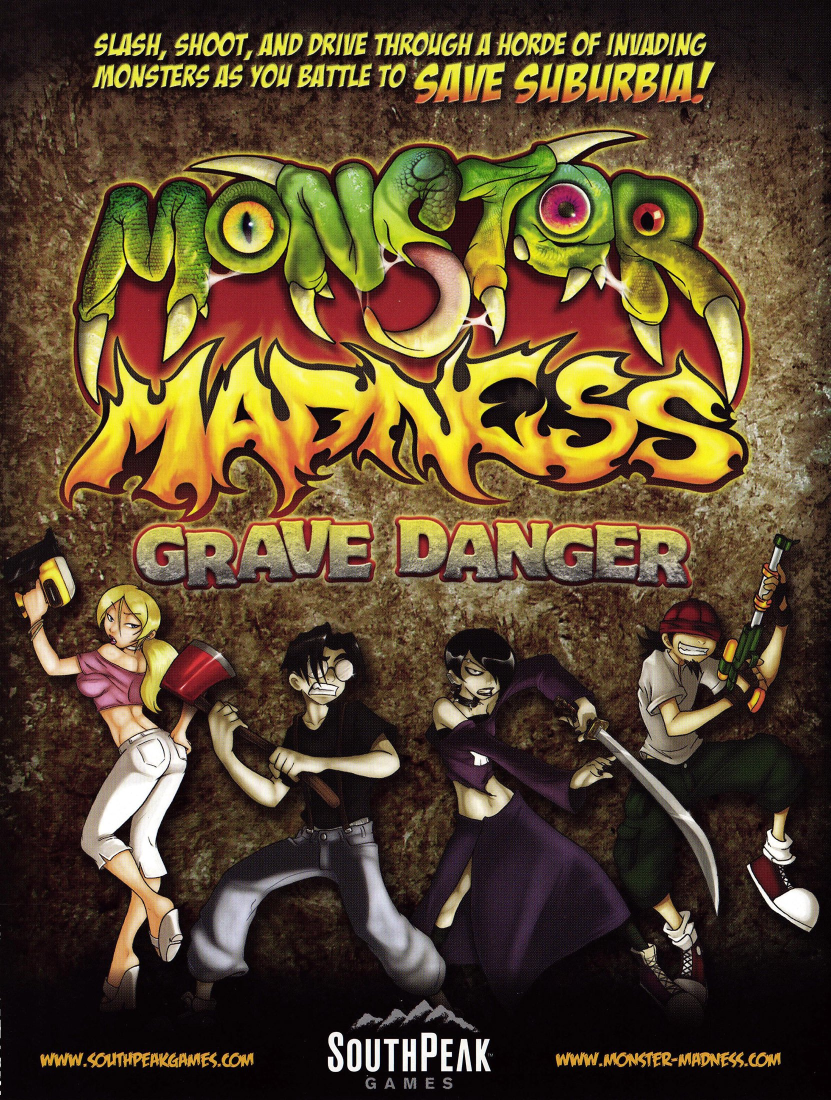
True to the endless pursuit of the high life, deathmatch scoring revolves not around a simple frag count, but rather the money you pilfer from the corpses of capped foes. Dropping some chump with a distance headshot might prove your general lethality, but it won't inflate your wallet unless you make it to the glowing green before the other jackals, and hoarding loot is mandatory if you're to progress through ten ranks that unlock appearance options and other good-



The character models of *Grand Theft Auto IV* are more detailed than anything the series has delivered previously. Niko's face alone is a map of scars and experience.

To get away from the cops, you need to get out of sight and escape an alert radius that expands with each "wanted" star you acquire. Here, Niko's got his work cut out for him, and none of these vehicles is likely to stay pristine for long.

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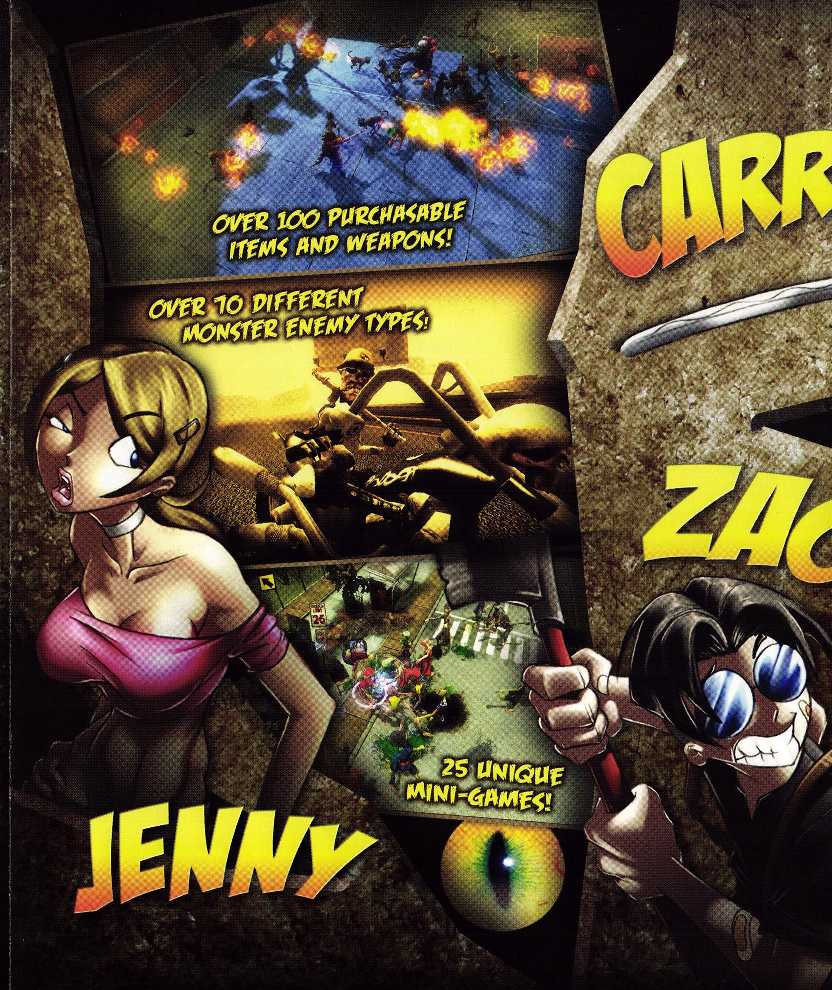
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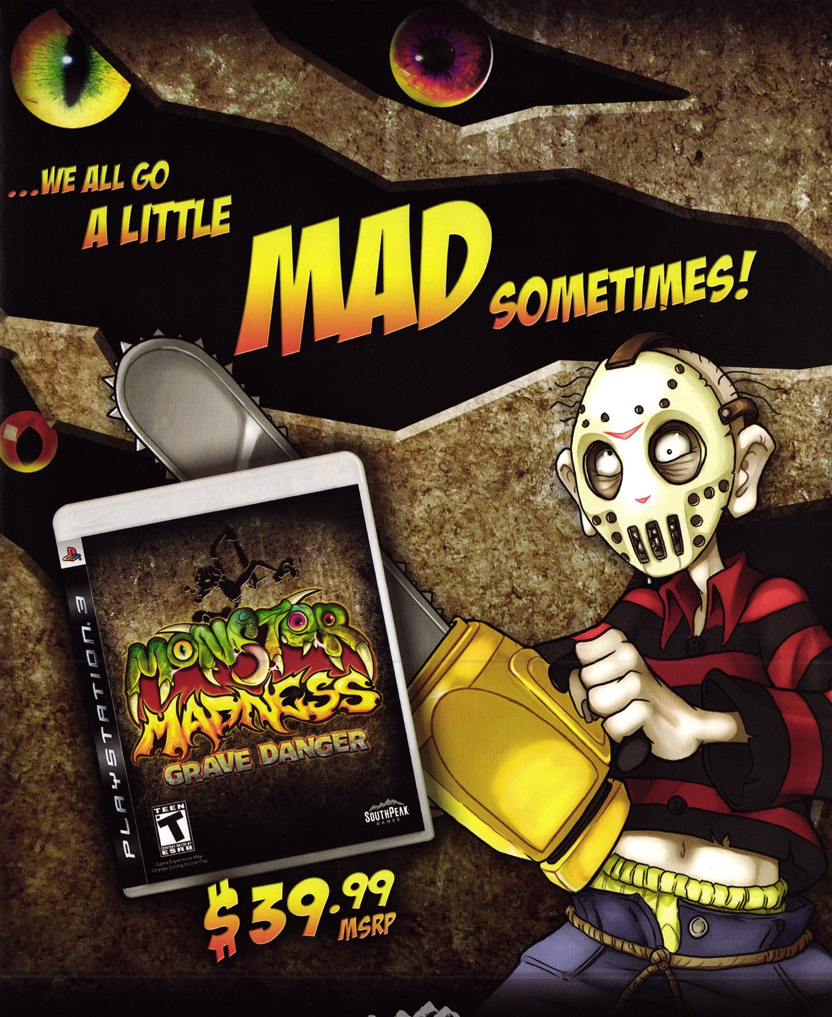
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Niko might be new to the country, but he's not wasting any time leaving great piles of smoking ruin in his wake. Like everything else in the *Grand Theft Auto* visual palette, explosions have been given a hot new makeover.

Wherever Niko goes, mass transit delays are sure to follow. Here's hoping the big lug lands somewhere other than the pavement six stories below.

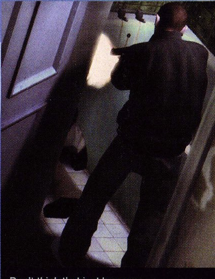
Multiplayer Hands On

ies that Rockstar wasn't quite ready to divulge. It's a simple adjustment, but it means every player has to strike a balance between exploiting secure firing positions and scooping up the bricks of cash left lying out in the open. Since it's better to be rich and dead than alive and broke, we all take enormous risks that pay off in memorable action sequences in addition to the hard-earned currency. A shotgun blast sends someone tumbling over a rooftop railing, a fumbled grenade incinerates both owner and target, and a crowded death sedan wreaks considerable havoc right until the driver catches a round in the face.

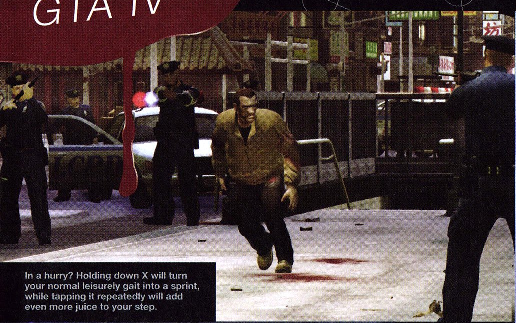
HOME ON THE FIRING RANGE

Rotten targeting hampered *GTA* firefights in the past, but beautifully implemented control improvements eliminate any previous shortcomings. Latch onto an opponent by holding L2, then make fine adjustments with the right thumbstick to kneecap a coward or lead a runner before flicking to new prey. Thanks to the same euphoria physics system that flips folks in an airborne ballet when you smack into them, each bullet realistically impacts your victim's movements, providing satisfying visual feedback to go with the beefy gunfire sound effects. The results are empowering even in extremis: faced with four cops and low ammo, we survive by quickly hobbling each in turn and heading for the hills.

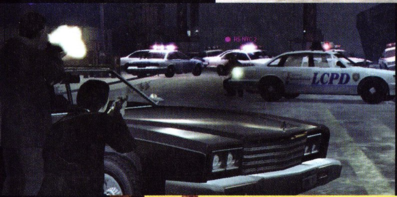
Turning off auto-aim provides a frenetic target-rich atmosphere suited to everyday running and gunning, but leaving it on shines a spotlight on a new cover system that's as vitally important online as it is throughout solo play. Sidle up to most objects in the world and tap R1 to press against them, then pop out for precision aiming or dispatch blind-fire shots without exposing more than your extended arm. Cover doesn't last forever: crates disintegrate, and drywall turns into Swiss cheese. New cars degenerate into crippled and flaming time-bomb deathtraps whether you're hiding behind them or gunning for first place in wonderfully antagonistic *GTA* race events staged between boats, bikes, cars, and helicopters. A favorite moment came when the crowded field of human contestants realized they were too far behind to win, and so turned en masse with all the concentrated firepower and reckless driving they could muster.



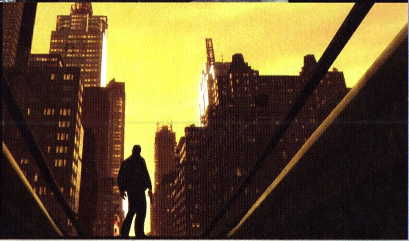
Don't think that just because Niko Bellic is a likeable and well-rounded character that he won't get his hands dirty. It wouldn't be *Grand Theft Auto* if you didn't have to whack some dudes.



In a hurry? Holding down X will turn your normal leisurely gait into a sprint, while tapping it repeatedly will add even more juice to your step.



"Use of unnecessary violence in the apprehension of the Blues Brothers *has* been approved."



Drastically improved lighting algorithms and a dynamic weather system mean that the same location can look markedly different at noon, lit up in the dead of night, or draped in dawn's early light.

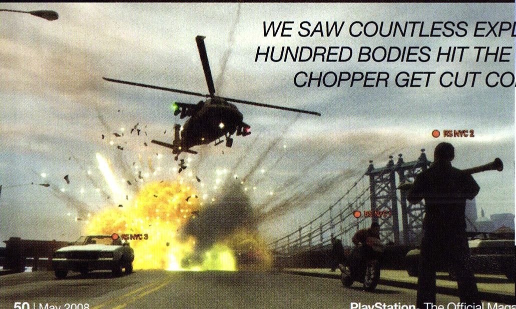
TEAM PLAYERS

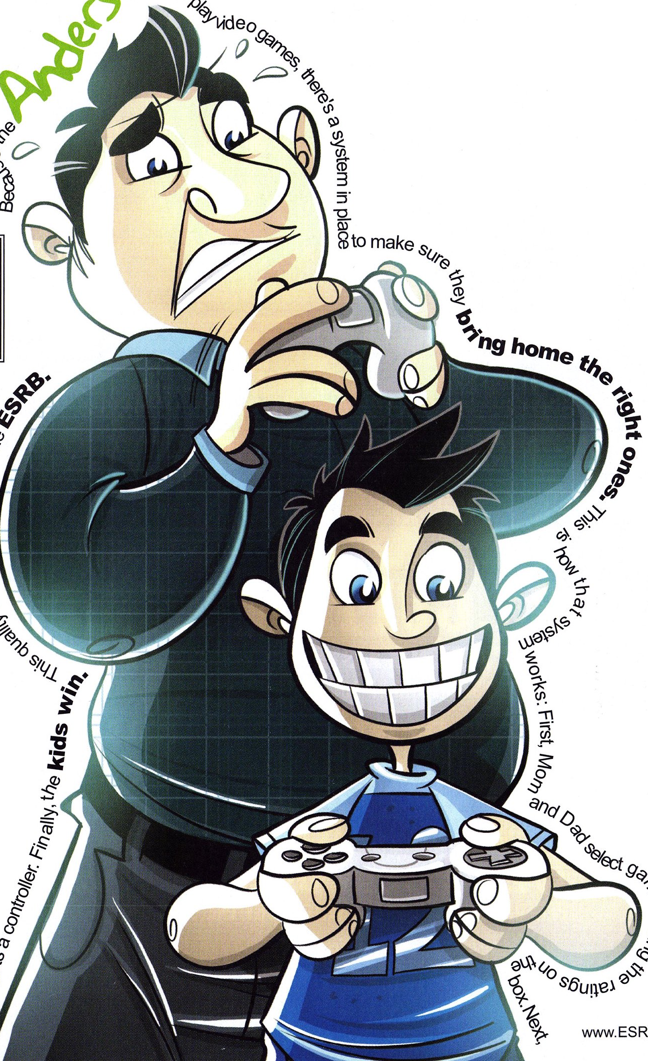
Cops 'n' Crooks mode is a race of a different sort. One team becomes a band of ne'er-do-wells fresh off their latest score, and a member of the crew is randomly chosen to be the all-important boss. If the head honcho dies during the getaway, the whole crew loses. Meanwhile, cops can see crook blips on the radar, but not where they're headed to next. The setup's simple, but you underestimate the city's twisting streets and unpredictable populace at your peril. Whichever side we found ourselves on, the resulting encounters were all breathlessly entertaining mad dashes that swayed unpredictably from rolling gun battles and tense foot chases to ad hoc team splits and sacrificial distraction efforts.

Our favorite multiplayer mode, though, was "Hangman's NOOSE," an electrifying four-player story-based co-op mission named after the city's equivalent of a SWAT force. A mob boss arrives at Francis International Airport only to find scads of trigger-happy cops. Ice enough of the boys in blue and he'll get off the plane, but how you get from there to the extraction point is entirely up to you. Snag a pair of armored cars and haul ass, put half your team in a chopper and slow pursuing forces from the air, or try something else altogether. Across half a dozen different engagements we saw countless explosions, well over a hundred bodies hit the tarmac, and a police chopper get cut completely and spectacularly in half in midair by our own helicopter's furious blades. We even got to pretend we were in Saigon by playing the sniping passenger in a gunship as it swooped and hovered over the chaos below.

Grand Theft Auto has long focused on servicing the bloodlust of a lone gunman at loose in a modern city's concrete canyons, but *GTAIV* seems poised to build on that legacy with carefully fashioned multiplayer components that play to new strengths even as they recall the series' roots. We worry that not even the mighty *GTA* can get every PS3 gamer to pony up for a headset, but if you choose your online crew with the same care you might plan a daring robbery, you could find yourself in a heaven reserved for wannabe felons when this crime saga finally drops. △○×□

WE SAW COUNTLESS EXPLOSIONS, WELL OVER A HUNDRED BODIES HIT THE TARMAC, AND A POLICE CHOPPER GET CUT COMPLETELY IN HALF...





Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Next, everyone gets a controller. Finally, the **kids win.**

This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

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ESRB

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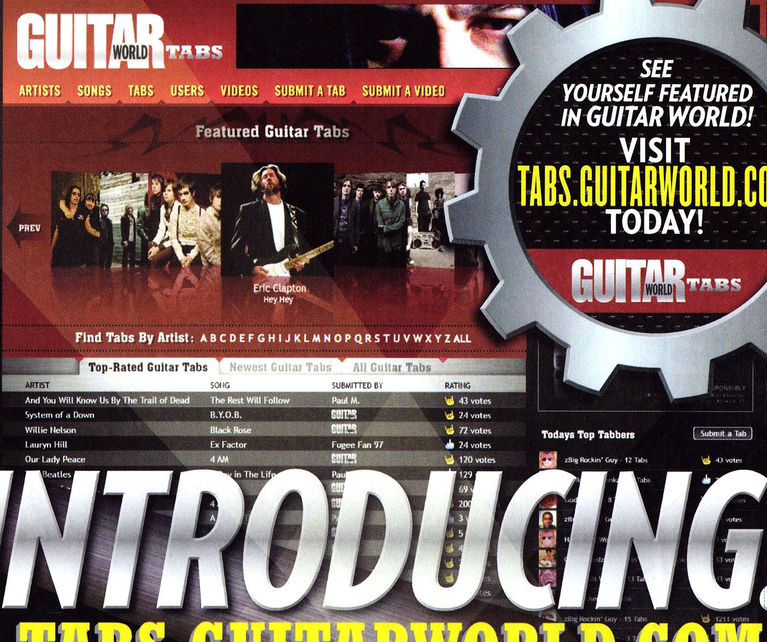
www.ESRB.org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ARTIST	SONG	SUBMITTED BY	RATING
And You Will Know Us By The Trail of Dead	The Rest Will Follow	Paul M.	43 votes
System of a Down	B.Y.O.B.	GUITAR	24 votes
Willie Nelson	Black Rose	GUITAR	72 votes
Lauryn Hill	Ex Factor	Fugee Fan 97	24 votes
Our Lady Peace	4 AM	GUITAR	120 votes

zBig Rockin' Guy - 12 Tabs 43 votes

zBig Rockin' Guy - 15 Tabs 1211 votes

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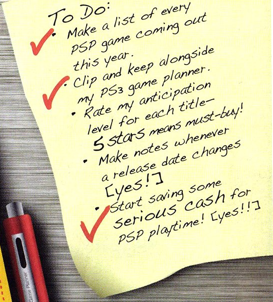
2008 PSP GAME PLANNER

2008 PSP Game Planner



To Do:

- ✓ Make a list of every PSP game coming out this year.
- ✓ Clip and keep alongside my PS3 game planner.
- Rate my anticipation level for each title— 5 stars means must-buy!
- Make notes whenever a release date changes [yes!]
- ✓ Start saving some serious cash for PSP playtime! [yes!!]

4394
Rush Assault Lv. 5
HOME
VOL
PSP

LET THE PLANNING BEGIN!

For PlayStation devotees, 2008 will be a banner year, chockablock with enough great games to thrill your thumbs for months to come. Thing is, that kinda creates a problem: How do you budget your money—and *time*—between the PS3 and PSP? (And that's not to mention PS2 and PSN titles!)

Relax. We're here to help. Hot on the heels of our handy PS3 Game Planner (you did pick up the March 2008 issue, right?), we've compiled an equally-as-helpful clip-and-keep guide with details on every PSP game coming this year. Like before, fill in the stars with your own anticipation ratings, and scribble in the margins as release dates change.

RATE AS YOU GO

★★★★★ **Absolutely *have* to get this one.**

★★★★☆ **Absolutely *want* to get this one.**

★★★☆☆ **This game is still sorta awesome.**

★★☆☆☆ **Not so awesome. Maybe used?**

★☆☆☆☆ **Highly unlikely. Does *never* work for you?**

2008 PSP Game Planner

B

B-Boy
RELEASE: June 17th
DEV: FreeStyle Games
PUB: SouthPeak Interactive
SUMMARY: SouthPeak set to localize Sony's 2006 break dancing title.
www.southpeakgames.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Beaterator
RELEASE: Q4
DEV: Rockstar Leeds
PUB: Rockstar Games
SUMMARY: Timbaland's beatmaker could ship before '09.
www.rockstargames.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Ben 10 sequel
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: TBA
PUB: D3Publisher of America
SUMMARY: *Ben 10: Protector of Earth* sequel may appear on PSP.
www.d3publisher.us
☆☆☆☆☆

Blood Bowl
RELEASE: Q4
DEV: Cyanide
PUB: Focus Home Interactive
SUMMARY: Games Workshop board game becomes a sports title.
www.bloodbowl-game.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Boulder Dash - Rocks!
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: 10Tacle Studios
PUB: First Star Software
SUMMARY: '80s arcade puzzle game gets a fresh handheld iteration.
www.boulder-dash-rocks.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Buzz!
RELEASE: Q3
DEV: Relentless Software
PUB: SCEA
SUMMARY: Portable extension of PS2 trivia series confirmed for North American release.
www.us.playstation.com
☆☆☆☆☆

C

Cid the Dummy
RELEASE: Q2
DEV: Twelve Interactive
PUB: Oxygen Games
SUMMARY: Assume the role of a crash test dummy in this original action/platformer.
www.twelvegames.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Coded Soul
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Gaia
PUB: TBA
SUMMARY: Original RPG has ties to *Folklore;* not yet announced for North American release.
www.us.playstation.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Code Lyoko: Quest for Infinity
RELEASE: June
DEV: Neko Entertainment
PUB: The Game Factory
SUMMARY: Cartoon Network animated series gets an action game adaptation.
www.gamefactorygames.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Crash: Invasion of the Bandicoot Snatchers
RELEASE: October
DEV: Vivendi
PUB: Vivendi
SUMMARY: Online retailers say this Bandicoot will be back in action this fall.
www.vugames.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII *
RELEASE: March 25th
DEV: Square Enix
PUB: Square Enix
SUMMARY: See box on page 55.
www.square-enix.com
☆☆☆☆☆

D

Daisenryaku VII Exceed
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: SystemSoft Alpha
PUB: TBA
SUMMARY: Strategic war sim hits Japan soon, but no word on U.S.
www.systemsoft.co.jp
☆☆☆☆☆

Destroy All Humans!: Big Willy Unleashed
RELEASE: May 19th
DEV: Locomotive Games
PUB: THQ
SUMMARY: Guide alien Crypto through the 1970s in this swinging sandbox romp.
www.destroyallhumansgame.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Dragon's Lair
RELEASE: Q4
DEV: United Coders
PUB: TBA
SUMMARY: Developer hoping to prep this adventure for holiday release.
www.unitedcoders.us
☆☆☆☆☆

E

Echochrome *
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: SCE Japan Studio
PUB: SCEA
SUMMARY: See box on page 55.
www.us.playstation.com
☆☆☆☆☆

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Bethesda
PUB: Bethesda
SUMMARY: This RPG port is rumored to be canceled, but Bethesda won't confirm or deny. C'mon, Bethesda, do the right thing!
www.bethsoft.com
☆☆☆☆☆

F

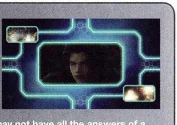
FIFA 09
RELEASE: October
DEV: EA Canada
PUB: EA Sports
SUMMARY: Another iteration of EA's worldwide soccer hit is expected this fall.
www.easports.com
☆☆☆☆☆

Final Fantasy: Dissidia
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Square Enix
PUB: Square Enix
SUMMARY: Fighting spin-off culls popular characters from the RPG franchise.
www.square-enix.com
☆☆☆☆☆

H

Hellboy: Science of Evil
RELEASE: June 24th
DEV: Krome Studios
PUB: Konami
SUMMARY: The comic demon is set to star in this action/shooter prior to the *Hellboy 2* film's release.
www.konami.com
☆☆☆☆☆

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII



Some gamers may have jumped the gun by importing last fall's Japanese version, but for the majority of North America's millions of *Final Fantasy* fans, March 25th marks the day when one of the strongest yearnings in all of gaming is finally satisfied: the arrival of another full-fledged *Final Fantasy VII* game. As a prequel, *Crisis Core* may not have all the answers of a true sequel or the nostalgic glow of a next-gen remake, but with a lengthy campaign, fantastic visuals, and a narrative infused with characters both new and old, it is arguably one of the best reasons to date to invest in a PSP.

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Clap Hanz
PUB: SCEA
SUMMARY: Fore! Second portable iteration, shown at GDC, should be here soon.
www.us.playstation.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

I

The Incredible Hulk

RELEASE: June
DEV: Amaze Entertainment
PUB: Sega
SUMMARY: Movie tie-in slated to hit handheld platforms (likely PSP) this summer.
www.sega.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Iron Man

RELEASE: May 2nd
DEV: Secret Level
PUB: Sega
SUMMARY: Film adaptation puts you in the comic hero's high-tech suit of armor.
www.sega.com/gamesite/ironman
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

K

* Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Square Enix
PUB: Square Enix
SUMMARY: *See box on page 56.*
www.square-enix.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

The King of Fighters Collection

RELEASE: Q4
DEV: SNK Playmore
PUB: SNK Playmore
SUMMARY: Five iteritions of the franchise fighter ('94-'98) come with Ad Hoc play and bonus goodies.
www.snkplaymoreusa.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

L

LEGO Batman: The Videogame

RELEASE: Q3
DEV: Traveller's Tales
PUB: Warner Bros. Interactive
SUMMARY: DC Comics hero gets the LEGO action game treatment later this year.
www.warnerbros.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures

RELEASE: June 27th
DEV: Traveller's Tales
PUB: LucasArts
SUMMARY: The *LEGO Star Wars* template meets the Indy film license this summer.
www.lucasarts.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

M

Madden NFL 09

RELEASE: August
DEV: EA Tiburon
PUB: EA Sports
SUMMARY: Are you ready for some football? EA Sports bets you will be in August.
www.easports.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Martial Arts: Capoeira

RELEASE: Q4
DEV: Twelve Interactive
PUB: Graffiti Entertainment
SUMMARY: Original fighting game to include betting, plus sports and RPG elements.
www.twelvegames.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel 2

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Kojima Productions
PUB: Konami
SUMMARY: Comic adaptation of *MGS2* to feature full voice acting; U.S. release unconfirmed.
www.konami.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Monster Hunter Freedom 2nd G

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Capcom
PUB: Capcom
SUMMARY: Hack-and-slash expansion not yet confirmed for North America, but we're hopeful.
www.capcom.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

N

N+

RELEASE: April 22nd
DEV: Silverbirch Studios
PUB: Atari
SUMMARY: Freeware favorite ninja platformer to see enhanced PSP release this spring.
www.nplusgame.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2

RELEASE: June
DEV: CyberConnect 2
PUB: Namco Bandai
SUMMARY: Second PSP Naruto fighter headed our way in summer.
www.namcobandaigames.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

NBA 09

RELEASE: October
DEV: SCE Studios San Diego
PUB: SCEA
SUMMARY: Sony's yearly basketball franchise should iterate again in October.
www.us.playstation.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

NBA Live 09

RELEASE: October
DEV: EA Canada
PUB: EA Sports
SUMMARY: Expect another portable professional hoops sim from EA this October.
www.easports.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

NCAA Football 09

RELEASE: July
DEV: EA Tiburon
PUB: EA Sports
SUMMARY: After a year off, college football returns to the PSP.
www.easports.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

O

The Office

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: MumboJumbo
PUB: MumboJumbo
SUMMARY: *Diner Dash*-esque television adaptation hit PC last year, but PSP iteration is MIA.
www.mumbojumbo.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

P

Pangya

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Ntreev Soft
PUB: TBA
SUMMARY: Handheld version of online golf favorite *(Super Swing Golf* on Wii) in the works.
www.ntreev.com/en/
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Phantasy Star Portable

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Alfa System
PUB: Sega
SUMMARY: *Phantasy Star Universe* (and expansion) hit the PSP, but North American release is unknown.
www.sega.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

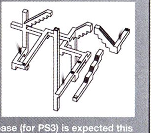
Pipe Mania

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Empire
PUB: Empire
SUMMARY: Keep the water flowing in this classic puzzler redux.
www.empireinteractive.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Professional Bull Riders

RELEASE: October
DEV: D2C Games
PUB: Crave Entertainment
SUMMARY: The officially licensed game of bull riding. 'Nuff said.
www.cravegames.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

ECHOCHROME



While hardly a game on the tip of everyone's tongue, *Echochrome* is one we've been watching since its announcement at E3 last year. As a mannequin, you traverse a series of suspended platforms presented as optical illusions—the only way you'll get through is by shifting the perspective and revealing unseen paths. It might sound a little odd, but YouTube it to get a glimpse of a game that looks and plays like nothing else out there. The PlayStation Network release (for PS3) is expected this summer, while the PSP version (shipping this spring in Japan) is still unconfirmed for North America. C'mon, SCEA, just do it!

Puzzle Quest: Galactrix

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Infinite Interactive
PUB: D3Publisher of America
SUMMARY: Puzzle/RPG franchise follow-up drops fantasy for space.
www.d3publisher.us
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

R

R-Type Command

RELEASE: May 6th
DEV: Irem
PUB: Atlus
SUMMARY: Turn-based strategy extension of classic shoot-'em-up franchise.
www.atlus.com/r-type
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

S

Samurai Showdown Anthology

RELEASE: Q4
DEV: SNK Playmore
PUB: SNK Playmore
SUMMARY: Seven fighters from classic franchise with two-player ad hoc support.
www.snkplaymoreusa.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

* Secret Agent Clank

RELEASE: Summer
DEV: High Impact Games
PUB: SCEA
SUMMARY: *See box on page 56.*
www.us.playstation.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1

RELEASE: Q2
DEV: SNK Playmore
PUB: SNK Playmore
SUMMARY: Sixteen SNK classics, including *Fatal Fury*, *Metal Slug*, and *Samurai Showdown*.
www.snkplaymoreusa.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Space Invaders Extreme

RELEASE: June 10th
DEV: Taito
PUB: TBA
SUMMARY: Square Enix rumored to bring this updated arcade classic to North America.
www.taito.co.jp/english
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Star Ocean: First Departure

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: TOSE
PUB: Square Enix
SUMMARY: Remake of SNES' *Star Ocean* not confirmed for North American release, but stay hopeful!
www.square-enix.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Star Ocean: Second Evolution

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: TOSE
PUB: Square Enix
SUMMARY: Second *Star Ocean* remake hits Japan in April; no word yet on the States.
www.square-enix.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

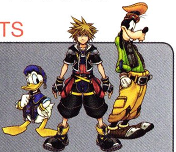
RELEASE: Summer
DEV: Krome Studios
PUB: LucasArts
SUMMARY: Portable *Star Wars* actioner to include playable segments from the films.
www.lucasarts.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

T

Tales of Rebirth

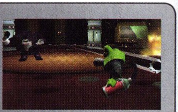
RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Namco Tales Studio
PUB: Namco Bandai
SUMMARY: Yet another RPG remake/port not yet announced for our shores.
www.namcobandaigames.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

KINGDOM HEARTS



PSP prequels to massive Square Enix franchises may be two-for-two this year if *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep* ships before the calendar turns to 2009. Revealed at the Tokyo Game Show last fall, *Birth by Sleep* takes place ten years prior to the original *Kingdom Hearts*, with a distinct scenario included for each of the three keyblade wielders from that time. While the core action RPG gameplay is expected to be similar to that of the PS2 franchise entries, an interview with director Tetsuya Nomura suggests that a command deck (as seen in *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* for Game Boy Advance) will also be drawn from.

SECRET AGENT CLANK



We're just over a year removed from the sharp *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*, and yet it appears that we're only months away from High Impact Games' follow-up, *Secret Agent Clank*. Expected in stores this summer, *Secret Agent Clank* shifts the spotlight to Ratchet's robot buddy as a gadget-adorned action spy of sorts. Apparently, we'll also see playable cameos from both Ratchet and Captain Qwark. Clank's segments have rarely been the highlights of previous *Ratchet & Clank* titles, but we have faith in this promising developer to wrap up a compelling action/platforming package in time for the summer heat.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

RELEASE: August
DEV: EA Tiburon
PUB: EA Sports
SUMMARY: Like Woods himself, this golf franchise appears to be unstoppable.
www.easports.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Tomb Raider: Underworld

RELEASE: Q4
DEV: Crystal Dynamics
PUB: Eidos Interactive
SUMMARY: The multiplatform franchise will hopefully grace the PSP for the third time.
www.eidos.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Tom Clancy's EndWar

RELEASE: Fall
DEV: Ubisoft Shanghai
PUB: Ubisoft
SUMMARY: Innovative new console RTS also announced for handheld.
endwargame.us.ubi.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

U

UEFA Euro 2008

RELEASE: May 19th
DEV: EA Sports
PUB: EA Sports
SUMMARY: When EA's FIFA Soccer isn't enough, hit UEFA for some European football.
www.easports.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

W

WALL-E

RELEASE: June 24th
DEV: Heavy Iron Studios
PUB: THQ
SUMMARY: Disney/Pixar film adaptation lets you control trash-cleaning robot in space.
www.thq.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Warriors Orochi

RELEASE: March 25th
DEV: Omega Force
PUB: KOEI
SUMMARY: *Dynasty/Samurai Warriors* hack-and-slash spin-off gets a handheld port.
www.koei.com/whoisorochi
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

X

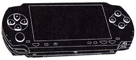
Xyanide Resurrection

RELEASE: Q2
DEV: Playlogic
PUB: Playlogic
SUMMARY: Handheld sequel to little-known Xbox space shooter.
www.playlogicinternational.com
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Y

Yggdra Union

RELEASE: TBA
DEV: Sting
PUB: TBA
SUMMARY: Atlus published the GBA version of this tactics RPG; will we see the PSP port?
www.sting.co.jp
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆



MUST BUY LIST
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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METAL GEAR SOLID MOBILE

SEE WHY KONAMI'S NEW THRILLER IS CONTENDING FOR GAME OF THE YEAR!

THE MINI-EDITION REVIEWS

NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE ASSAULT

ORCS VS. ELVES II

SWAT ELITE TROOPS

METAL GEAR SOLID MOBILE

SNAKE THROWS DOWN THE GAME OF THE YEAR GAUNTLET

The sophisticated "stealthy" gameplay we've come to know and love in the console versions of the *Metal Gear Solid* series translates amazingly well to the small screen. *Metal Gear Solid Mobile* is a technical marvel and the best surprise so far this year.

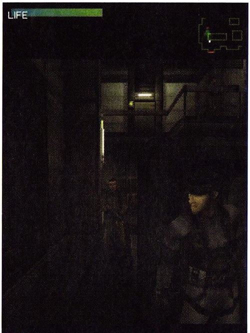
The graphics are dark but luscious—this game is about stealth after all. Our hero "Snake" must often keep to the shadows, avoiding trouble when he can or dealing with it "quiet-like." The 3D presentation is slick, and the textures are gritty and brimming with detail.

You can even take a real world picture of say, a green shirt, and use it in the game as camouflage. The game uses camera phones to sense motion, as well, allowing you to wave your phone like a Wii remote to do things in the game such as shake a spraycan or play one of the hacker mini-games (on supported handsets).

The focus on stealth is a boon to the mobile platform, where controls aren't as standard as consoles, and complex button maneuvers can be tough to pull off. The slower pace is right at home here and a few simple tutorial missions will have you in Snake's boots in no time. The ability to switch between first and third person views spices things up and adds to the already-high level of immersion.

The story, set between the events of MGS 1 and MGS 2, is not up to the standards of the game's bigger brothers, which is something you have to expect in the mobile world where games have to "get to the point" quicker to be suitable for frequent, short bouts of play. Snake's moves are also a bit herky-jerky, as they were with the early console MGS games. Our final nit we'll pick is that the framerates were a bit inconsistent on our phone, an LG VX9400.

Still, you should make no mistake: this is an original *Metal Gear* game for your handset, not some quick-and-dirty port. The presentation is cutting edge, and the game play is challenging, engaging, and innovative.



Metal Gear Solid Mobile looks and plays very similarly to the PS2 versions, which is no small feat.

GENRE: Action/ Stealth // **DEVELOPER:** Konami // **PUBLISHER:** Konami // **CARRIERS:** Verizon (exclusive for 3 months) // **ONLINE PLAY:** No // **SAVES:** Yes // **SOUND:** Yes // **VIBRATION:** No

SCORE

SWAT ELITE TROOPS

A FLASH-BANGING GOOD TIME!

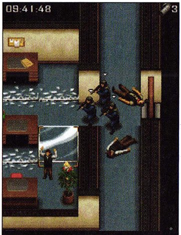
A terrorist group has taken control of an office building and are up the usual bad guy hyjinks: holding hostages, making demands, and prank-calling your girlfriend. It's up to you and your two-man team of butt-kicking, name-taking *SWAT Elite Troops* anti-terrorist specialists to do their thing—clean house.

You control one officer while the other two follow your lead. You can tell your cohorts to scout ahead a bit, but this is really pretty useless—they continually get stuck behind things and rarely seem to know what to do with what they find, anyway. The poor path-finding AI is the one major squeaky wheel in what is otherwise a smooth and entertaining ride.

Clearing each office floor room-by-room without ever really quite knowing what's behind each door is a challenging proposition that drips with suspense. The story unfolds as you progress through each of the 16 levels, and the repetitive nature of the gameplay is broken up nicely with scripted "instant tactical decision" moments, such as the need to issue a sniper team the green light to cap a suspected bad guy. Choose poorly and a good guy might get hurt, which in turn hurts your score, and your chances to get past the next level. Mini-games such as diffusing bombs and hacking computers also add some welcome variety.

Depending on your score in each level (which varies depending upon just how much butt you kicked and mistakes you may have made), you receive skill points that you can use to upgrade your team, or individual SWAT troops, with speed, health, and additional boosts. These are needed, too, because while the game might start slowly, the challenge ramps up significantly as you progress. Thankfully the simple-to-use controls never get in the way of the action.

Our only other significant niggle is that it can hard to decipher what's going on when you engage several baddies at once in close quarters—this happens quite often and can be quite deadly if you don't act quickly enough.



Exterminate—by any means necessary—all terrorist scum from this besieged office building, SWAT-style.

GENRE: Action/ Strategy // **DEVELOPER:** Vivendi Games mobile // **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi Games mobile // **CURRENT CARRIERS:** All Major // **ONLINE PLAY:** No // **SAVES:** No // **VIBRATION:** Yes // **SOUND:** Yes

SCORE

LIFE
Codec
Equip
CLR
SEND
1
2 abc
3 def
4 ghi
5 jkl
6 mno
8 tuv
9 wxyz
#

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ORCS VS. ELVES II

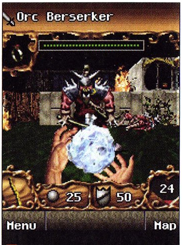
AN OLD-SCHOOL, HARDCORE MOBILE GEM THAT'S HARD TO PUT DOWN

If you've got old-school gaming roots, particularly when it comes to dungeon crawlers, here's a mobile game you don't have to be embarrassed to admit you play... and play a lot. If you're not an old-school gamer, well, you should still add this game to your mobile if you're even the slightest bit interested in *D&D*-style games.

Orcs & Elves II is the second in what will hopefully be a series of mobile games for noted FPS developer Id Software (the makers of *Doom* and *Quake* if you've been living under a rock). You are Valin, a thief with a wise-talking magic stick (stolen from the hero of the first game, but that's all you need to know about that). As Valin, you're tasked with saving your hometown from a "growing evil" (okay, so Id's never really been known for deep plots), a process that has you traverse seven massive levels that offer up much more diversity than the first game, including towns that are chock full of NPCs, dark and deadly dungeons, and haunted forests.

The graphics are quite good for a mobile game, with nicely detailed monsters and battle animations (including impressive gibs) and intuitive controls. You have a generous arsenal of melee, ranged, and magical weapons to deal destruction with—as well as potions and special items such as magical rings you can equip to give your stats a boost. As you play you gain experience and your character levels up, becoming more and more powerful. An auto-map makes it easy to keep track of each sprawling level, and where to go next.

Other than an overabundance of brown textures, a classic Id hallmark, their ambitious epic *Orcs & Elves II* comes with our highest recommendation.



Orcs & Elves II is old-school, dungeon-crawling RPG fun at its best.

GENRE: RPG // **DEVELOPER:** EA Mobile // **PUBLISHER:** Id Software & EA Mobile // **CURRENT CARRIERS:** All Major // **ONLINE PLAY:** No // **SAVES:** Yes // **VIBRATION:** No // **SOUND:** Yes

SCORE

NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET

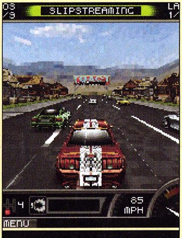
ONLY RACING JUNKIES NEED APPLY

After a few circuits in the urban underground racing scene, EA's perennial racer has gone "legit" once again with *Prostreet*. Get behind the wheel of 16 licensed cars, like the ultra-powerful Nissan GT-R Proto, and hit the pro circuit to prove exactly who the best driver is.

You get to prove your skills on 12 separate tracks racing against nine opponents. To help, you can tweak your ride's performance in four major categories (speed, handling, and so on) to try to get an edge in each every race.

Your car automatically accelerates and adjusts speed for turns, leaving you to focus on the steering and use of nitrous boosts. Smoothly executed slides, or drifts, in turns will top off your nitrous tank, and rocket you down those straight-aways.

Prostreet serves up solid sounds and adrenaline-pumping easy-to-get into racing. Unfortunately, the graphics are pixelated, and the stuttering framerates made extended play sessions an eye-straining endeavor.



As you play you can unlock codes that will help you progress in the console versions of *Prostreet*.

GENRE: Racing // **DEVELOPER:** Iron Monkey Studios // **PUBLISHER:** EA Mobile // **CARRIERS:** All Major // **ONLINE PLAY:** No // **SAVES:** Yes // **VIBRATION:** Yes // **SOUND:** Yes

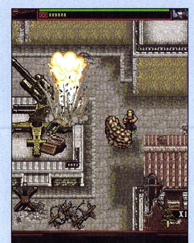
SCORE

MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE ASSAULT

TRY NOT TO SCREAM "INCOMING!" WHILE PLAYING ON THE BUS!

Airborne puts you in the boots of Boyd Travers, a soldier with the famous 82nd Airborne, as he fights in a series of eight missions in some of WW II's most well-known battlegrounds. You'll quickly learn that cover is your friend, as Travers automatically ducks behind walls and pops up to fire when you press the trigger. The enemies are numerous and there is no shortage of incoming bullets, grenades, mortars, and artillery.

The developers deserve major kudos for making their game as simple to play as possible. That simplicity belies a higher level of strategic thinking that's required to make it through each of the diverse missions and progress to the next level. Unfortunately, you don't experience the sky-diving fun implied by the "airborne" moniker—all action begins with your feet firmly planted on terra firma. Thankfully, however, the action still does justice to the *MOH* portion of the title.

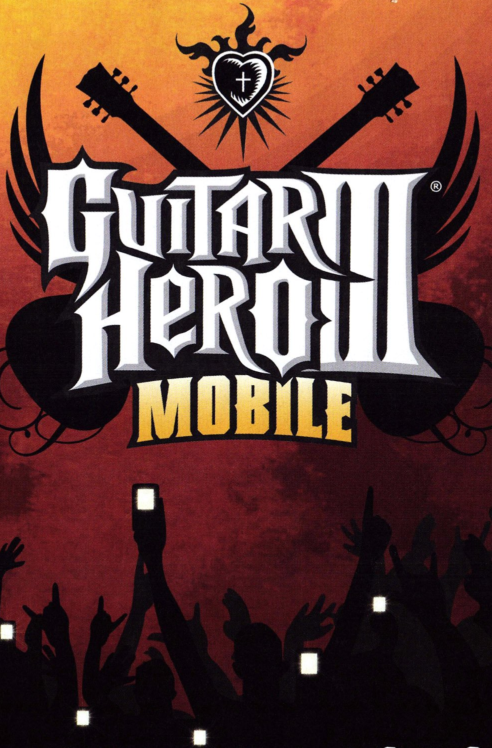


Intuitive controls, clever level design, and plenty of action make *Airborne* a must for action fan veterans.

GENRE: Action // **DEVELOPER:** EA Mobile // **PUBLISHER:** EA Mobile // **CURRENT CARRIERS:** All Major // **ONLINE PLAY:** No // **SAVES:** Yes- Automatic // **VIBRATION:** Yes // **SOUND:** Yes

SCORE

YOUR THUMBS WILL NEED REHAB!



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RATINGS

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL**
An excellent game that takes its genre to new heights.

★★★★ **GREAT**
Not flawless, but a truly great game and among the best in its genre.

★★★ **OKAY**
An overall positive experience for fans of the genre or subject matter.

★★ **POOR**
Suffers from several major flaws that really damage the experience.

★ **AWFUL**
Not worth your time or money.

GAME of the month Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

p 64

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

In tribute to this month's Karaoke titles, we share the most embarassing songs on our iPods.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SONG: **On a Storyteller's Night – Magnum**
Rob's excuse is that he loved the album's cover artwork (vinyl version), but this song sounds like an ode to Middle-earth and evokes images of a youthful Rob spending Saturday nights huddled in his parents basement playing *Dungeons & Dragons.*

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *MLB 08: The Show, Pro Evolution Soccer 2008*

NOW PLAYING: *Crisis Core, Silent Hill Origins, Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

SONG: **Tunak Tunak Tun – Daler Mehndi**
Wha-wha Wha-wha Wha? Teresa says this song just makes her happy and she wants to learn how to dance like Daler. At this point, we could mock Teresa, but we'd do so at the risk of offending about a billion people. Nicely played, Teresa.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Crisis Core, Mana Khemia, Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz, Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds*

NOW PLAYING: *PixelJunk Monsters*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

SONG: **Paris Is Burning – Dokken**
Ken insists that there are no embarrassments on his iPod, but concedes that a song by '80s hair-metal act Dokken comes the closest. We cry foul since his selection actually rocks and isn't even a power ballad, but then we imagine what his hairdo must have looked like 20 years ago...

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: Nada. All they let me do was draw this issue. *Hmmph.*

NOW PLAYING: *Burnout Paradise; FIFA 08*

GARY STEINMAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

SONG: **You Were There – Steven Geraghty**
This wistful closing theme from *ICO* reveals Gary's tender side. We're all getting restraining orders so we don't have to "hug it out" when he gets all needy.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: Street maps so I can shave time off my hellish commute.

NOW PLAYING: *Crisis Core*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

SONG: **The Last Farewell – Roger Whittaker**
Come deadline week, Roger begins channeling an 18th century sailor from a previous life. "Aye, saying fare thee well to me bonnie lass do bring a tear to me eye."

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *SingStar '90s*

NOW PLAYING: *Burnout Paradise; MLB 08: The Show; Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds*

MIKEL REPARAZ
EDITOR, GAMESRADAR

SONG: **Tamagotchi – Daze**
A song about virtual pets, sung by a Scandinavian dance band. According to Mikel, it's less cool than it sounds, but twice as catchy. Really, Mikel? *Less* cool?

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Dark Sector*

NOW PLAYING: *Patapon, Condemned 2: Bloodshot*

Retro View

The big games we were playing this month in PlayStation history.

ONE YEAR AGO...

God of War II (PS2)
(9.5 out of 10)

MotorStorm (PS3)
(8.5 out of 10)

Virtua Tennis 3 (PS3)
(8.5 out of 10)

FIVE YEARS AGO...

Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner (PS2)
(9 out of 10)

Splinter Cell (PS2)
(9 out of 10)

NBA Street Vol. 2 (PS2)
(9 out of 10)

10 YEARS AGO...

Dead or Alive (PS1)
(4.5 stars)

Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit (PS1)
(4.5 stars)

Pitfall 3D (PS1)
(4 stars)

You'll finally discover the true story behind this classic *Final Fantasy VII* moment.

Crisis Core:

Final Fantasy VII

The best Final Fantasy spin-off yet

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Square Enix, Inc. DEVELOPER: Square Enix Co., Ltd.

When Cloud, Tifa, Red XIII, Barret, Yuffie, Vincent, Cid, and Cait Sith battled Sephiroth for the final time (with the heartbreaking lack of one important party member), I remember whispering to myself, "Please don't let this be the end!" But when the epilogue rolled minutes later, and I saw that 500 years had passed and Midgar was gone, I knew that a sequel would be unlikely. I sulked for a few days, and then I had to move on, but even today, *Final Fantasy VII* remains one of my all-time favorite videogame experiences. (And yes, I cried during that scene with Aerith.)

So when *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* was announced as a prequel to the game that had cemented my love for RPGs, I was ambivalent. A part of me was thrilled at the possibility of being reunited with the settings and characters I loved so much. I even secretly hoped that *Crisis Core* would surpass its predecessor. But most of me was petrified that the prequel would undermine my cherished memories.

Fan Service at Its Best

Now that I've played through *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, I can tell you that my memories are safe. In fact, *Crisis Core* retroactively enriched my experience of *Final Fantasy VII* because I now know more about the characters' backgrounds. But that said, *Crisis Core* isn't as "good" as *FFVII*: It lacks the immense world, the intricate weapon and materia systems, the strategy-focused combat, and the complex side quests. I'm not saying *Crisis Core* isn't enjoyable—it certainly is—but because it's on a different system, serving a different purpose, and in a different era of game technology, it can't mimic the experience of *FFVII*. But as a spin-off, it does exactly what it ought to: Draw us into a new story to enhance an already rich game world.

Playing through *Crisis Core* is like "playing" a movie: the story and characters take center stage. In this case, the protagonist is Zack Fair, SOLDIER Second Class. Throughout the game, we follow his journey, learning his dreams, his moral struggles, and his fears. In this respect, *Crisis Core* absolutely succeeds. The character interactions are well-written, decently voiced, and convincingly animated, and the story itself is poignantly told, so much so that *Crisis Core* succeeds as the second game to ever make me cry. As a service to fans, Square Enix includes lengthy segments featuring characters from *FFVII*, too, so you'll learn more about favorites like Cloud, Aerith, Tifa, and Sephiroth.

Like a movie, the game is graphically dazzling. In fact, during cut scenes (and during the minute-long summon animations), I felt like I was watching *Advent Children* on my PSP. Yes, the FMVs are that good. The rest of the game's graphics are top-notch, too, and even if you've never heard of *Final Fantasy VII* and couldn't care less about good game storytelling, I recommend playing *Crisis Core* just so you can see its graphical prowess.

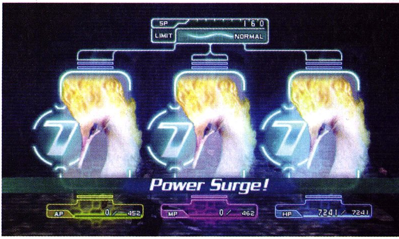
However, also like a movie, the experience is linear. In between story scenarios, you're free to explore Midgar's secrets, but once you're sent to Wutai or Nibelhiem on soldierly duties, you mostly go from point A to point B, playing through mini-games, pseudo-random battles, or boss fights along the way. Even so, the game world feels rich, especially in familiar territories, like when you discover the safe in Shinra Mansion (remember that? You get to open it again, too) or stroll through the Sector 5 playground. Another feature that spices up the world is the Mail system. Characters you've met will send you tidbits detailing their opinions about world events. You can even join fan clubs (like a Sephiroth fan club…if you can find it). So despite the lack of an overworld, *Crisis Core* still manages to immerse you in the *FFVII* universe, just in a more structured way.

Less than Epic Battles

As much as I wanted the game to be perfect, *Crisis Core's* combat system is a weakness. Unlike *FFVII*'s turn-based battles, which required combining the right materia and using characters strategically, *Crisis Core* is mostly a hack-and-cast. You can get through most fights by rolling behind an enemy (all your hits are critical from the back), slashing your sword a few times, dodging a couple of enemy attacks, and then repositioning yourself behind the monster again. Cure yourself as needed. That's it. Elemental spells like fira or blizzard aren't very useful since enemies can easily avoid them, and I barely tapped into my generous materia supply. It's disappointing. While I found the action-based combat fun and personally never bored of the repetition (and even with the diversity of enemy types, it *does* get repetitive), I wanted to try out my different materia. I wanted to experiment and discover which ones worked well together, but I never really needed to.

In Hard mode the enemies are exponentially more difficult. Better techniques are required, but without the moves and combos found in action games like *God of War*, you feel somewhat handicapped…like an acrobat whose ankles are chained to bowling balls. Against the more numerous enemies, the system feels clumsy and sluggish.

Zack and Cloud. Two spiky-haired dudes in a totally platonic relationship.

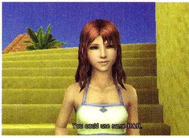


Triple sevens means Zack gains a level!

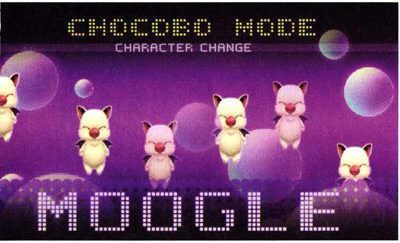
Courage Boost! Lv. 3
You gain most of your summons through the Mission mode.

> **"Playing through *Crisis Core* is like 'playing' a movie: the story and characters take center stage."**

Cissnei rounds out the cast of Turks in *Crisis Core*.



Because you battle with only one character, Phoenix Downs work differently. You cast it on yourself before battle, and it'll stay on you until you die. Then, it'll revive you.

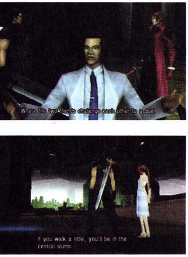


A special mode in the DMW lets you access the more humorous summons.

Sephiroth!
our mind?

Ready? Set? Let the fanfic begin!

Watch *Last Order* (after beating CC). Just do it.


Where the two friends challenge each other to a duel
If you walk a little, you'll be in the central slums

Aerith, Dr. Hojo...You'll encounter some familiar faces.

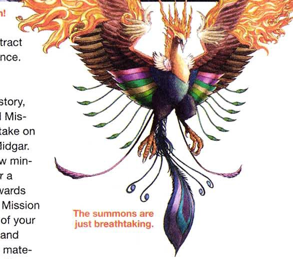
PSP | R

During combat, a DMW (Digital Mind Wave) spins in the corner, acting as a slot machine of sorts. When images match, you enter a "Modulating Phase," which could activate limit breaks, summons, level ups, and exclusive cut scenes, depending on your luck. At its best, the DMW is a neat concept that adds freshness to traditional action-based fighting. At its worst, it interrupts the flow of combat, occasionally modulating during easy fights where you don't need it. I developed a love-hate relationship with the system. Leveling up, though random, is consistent and steady, so that doesn't present a problem.

Overall, though flawed, *Crisis Core*'s combat system is enjoyable. And since many "random" battles are avoidable (hint: hug the wall in wider areas), it doesn't distract much from the game experience.

Flawed, but Still Solid

In addition to its 10-14 hour story, *Crisis Core* offers an optional Mission system, where you can take on tasks to help the people of Midgar. Each mission takes only a few minutes to complete—perfect for a portable system—but the rewards are lucrative. It's through the Mission system that you'll earn most of your summons (including cactuar and tonberry, whee!), higher-level materia, and rare items. An optional boss even awaits those ambitious enough to complete all 300 missions. With an additional 20-40 hours worth of content (depending on your play style), you really get your money's worth. Just beware that these side missions utilize only a half-dozen environments and are very simplistic (just search for the mini-boss, then kill it). Some might find the missions dry, but hey, it's optional. Personally, I enjoyed scouring them for every last treasure chest.



The summons are just breathtaking.

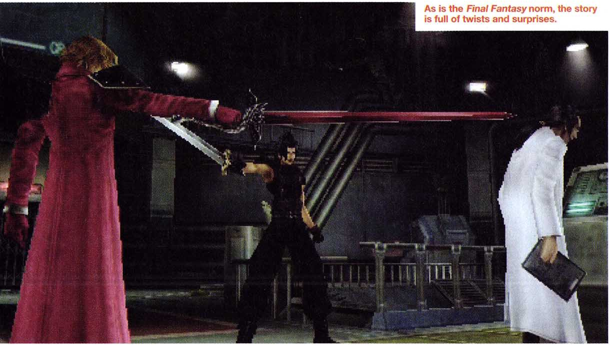
Other perks in the game include a materia fusion system and portable shops (you access them through your menus), but it's really the *FFVII*-infused story that sells *Crisis Core*. One last concern is the load times. With a PSP 2000, they aren't much of an issue, but ten-second load times aren't uncommon in older model PSPs.

I admit that *Crisis Core* isn't perfect. But as an extension of a game I love, I can forgive its flaws, especially since the story and characters are so poignant. Those who aren't already obsessed with *Final Fantasy VII* may disagree, but I for one am grateful for the depth *Crisis Core* has added to the *FFVII* universe and wholeheartedly recommend it to fans and newcomers alike.

Teresa Dun

★★★★½

As is the *Final Fantasy* norm, the story is full of twists and surprises.



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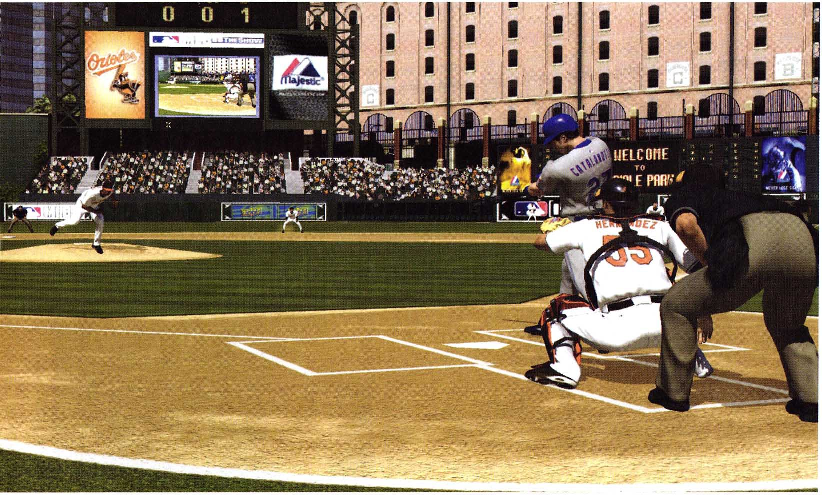


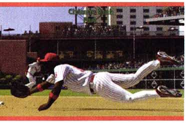
You can choose to play any of your own music you have stored on your PS3 hard drive, and can even organize it into playlists in your own *MLB* jukebox.

MLB 08:

The Show

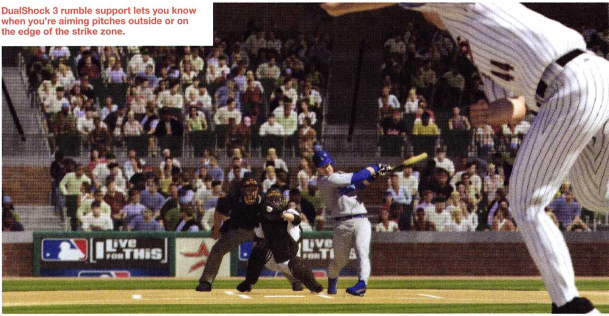
A four-hit shutout...hugely positive, but not perfect

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: EVERYONE PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEA SAN DIEGO



Honestly, I could hardly wait to get my hands on the final version of SCEA's latest baseball showcase. The anticipation mounted after spending so many hours with last year's eminently playable (if slightly flawed) release, and then seeing and hearing of the tweaks that would pitch *MLB 08* into perfect-game territory. It was always going to be tough, if nigh on impossible, to improve on the batter/pitcher mechanic that plays with all the subtlety of real-world baseball. Amazingly enough though, the visible tweaks to that crucial mechanic (a less-specific indicator if you guess the correct pitch type and location, thereby still enforcing an element of skill and guesswork on where to swing) do add to the challenge of the match-ups. For *08*, if you guess the correct pitch type and location, you're rewarded with the outer strike zone flashing red and just the general area of the location, rather than a specific spot—and so now you still have to watch the ball

After the game you can view a large number of events in the Replay Vault. Stolen bases, double plays, RBI knocks, and big flys are all stored for your viewing pleasure, with full control over the camera angles.



DualShock 3 rumble support lets you know when you're aiming pitches outside or on the edge of the strike zone.

and decide if it's worth swinging, rather than knowing immediately if it was in or out of the zone as in last year's version.

The outfield position player reactions also show improvement, as the AI throws to the appropriate base from all positions with greater consistency, and you now have the chance of snatching back home run-bound balls by getting your outfielder to the fence and timing your leap correctly. The mechanic is incredibly intuitive and adds to the level of control you feel over events on the field, as well as contributing potential star plays and water-cooler smack-talk fodder if you pull off that feat against a buddy. When you do execute significant plays—crucial RBI knocks, homers, diving catches—the moment can be saved in a new Replay Vault that provides background to the game presentation as you pause during innings later in the game. Again, though a relatively minor upgrade, it adds flavor to every single game experience.

That's important given the fact that playing through a full 162 game season plus play-offs is not only engaging (and time consuming) but also extremely rewarding. It's incredible how realistic the player stats appear come the end of the season.

While the on-field characters have also been given detail upgrades (it's recommended that you set your PS3 to play at the optimum resolution of 720p) and display some slick new animations, some of the animation transitions are woefully sluggish. When Bengie Molina can beat out an infield hit because the shortstop took seconds to move from the grabbing animation to the throwing stance, it's not only a problem—it can be a frustrating game breaker.

We also saw odd animation situations when the shortstop, just a foot from second base, performed some slow, dopey lob to the second baseman, allowing the runner to be safe easily, and then in another slow transition, have the batter easily beat out the throw to first. What looked on contact to be a bread-and-butter double play actually resulted in no outs and a handful of expletives.

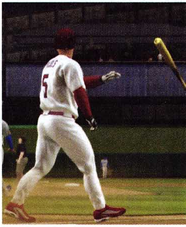
Those quirks happened often enough through our pursuit of the franchise and season modes to be frustrating, and on a couple of occasions cost us the game. (And when you're playing as the anemic offense of the Giants, you need to scrape out all the wins you can!) Still, over 100 games later, it hadn't killed the spirit for getting down and dirty with the franchise mode, working trades, and even scouring the post-season amateur draft for the top talent. Better yet, tweaks to the Road to the Show mode make progress more forgiving, and therefore the time investment more rewarding than last year's sometimes spirit-breaking slog.

It does seem that last year's out-of-the-box foibles with online play are back for *08*. While connecting to other players was more consistent, in our experience the gameplay was slow, and lag was a real issue, causing wild swings, even wilder throws, and those odd animation quirks making bunts and hit-and-run plays far more common (and effective) than they should be. Even the commentary is wonky, with high tight heaters being described as bouncing in the dirt and one clearly foul bunt down the third-base line called a hit. The depth of the online league contests, and simplicity in setting up your own leagues remains, and we're hopeful that these quirks were the product of playing the first handful of games online with other early adopters.

It might appear that the focus here has been on a couple of frustrations, but ultimately none of them induced controller-flinging tantrums. It's more testimony to the incredibly slick, thoughtful, ideally presented package of baseball gameplay that these relatively minor issues stick out (and hopefully also serves as ongoing motivation to ensure the gameplay attains the perfection within its grasp through patches or updates). For baseball fans of any persuasion, *MLB 08: The Show* is a phenomenally feature rich package that you'll be playing all the way until *09* comes around.

Rob Smith

★★★★½



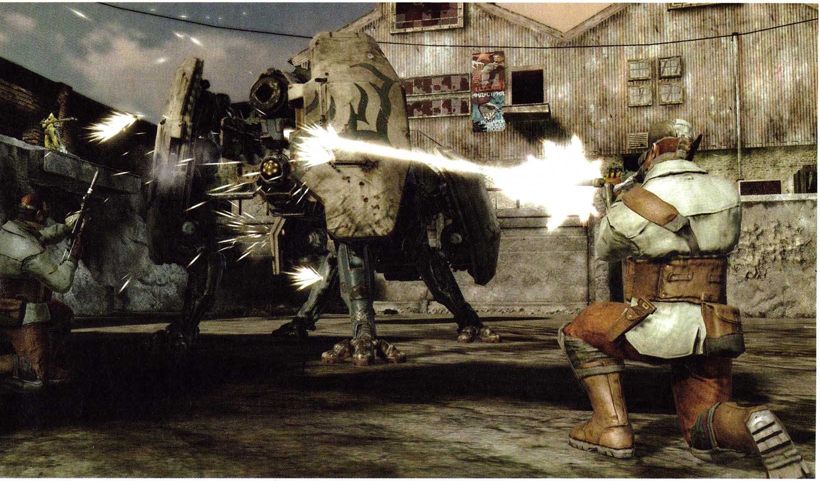
The batter/pitcher mechanic has been subtly refined, making everything from walks to home runs that much more satisfying.

The winner is...

In our first season, where we simmed many of the games, our woeful Giants finished 69–93 (actually better than the 100-loss projection most pundits expect for the coming season). Would you believe that the Braves swept the Yankees to win the World Series? Bet you can get good odds on that outcome with your favorite Vegas establishment before the season starts!

For the statistically minded, a slew of batter and pitcher data and analysis is available throughout the game so you can make more informed decisions on pitch strategy, for example.

Trivia question: In which stadium did AstroTurf make its debut?



That big, armored, four-legged monster is the Jackal tank. Yes, you can drive it.

PS3 | R

Dark Sector

One spinning hunk of metal makes all the difference

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: D3 Publisher of America DEVELOPER: Digital Extremes

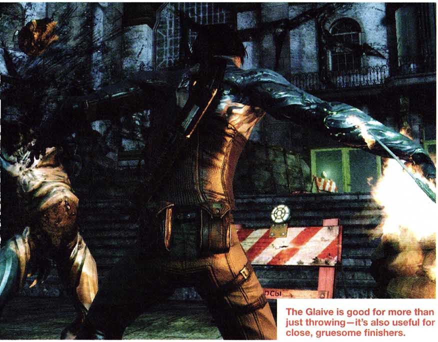
It's been a long time coming, but after four years of chatter, *Dark Sector*—one of the first PS3 games ever announced—is finally here. Delivering a blood-drenched, horror-tinged romp through dank corridors and crumbling streets, *Dark Sector* stars Hayden Tenno, a "cleaner" for a CIA-like "Agency" who's sent to the (fictional) post-Soviet republic of Lasria to tie up some loose ends. While there, he's confronted with an extremely hostile local militia, swarms of metal-skinned zombies, and a deadly virus that turns one of his arms into living steel.

However, the *real* star is what's attached to that arm: a whirring chunk of telepathically controlled metal called the Glaive, which becomes integral to just about everything you'll do in *Dark Sector.* Part boomerang, part shuriken, and part flying guillotine, it can solve puzzles, retrieve out-of-reach items, and cleanly slice heads and limbs off your enemies with just a little bit of practice. It's also a big part of what keeps *Dark Sector* from being just another in a long line of linear third-person shooters showcasing a cover-focused combat dynamic.

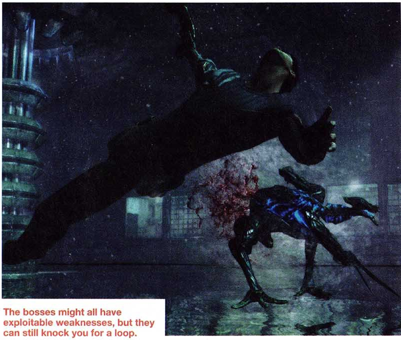
Test Your Mettle

During its black-and-white first level, however, that's exactly what *Dark Sector* is. Hayden starts out with little more than a pistol, a cool face-mask, and orders to raid a Lasrian prison in search of a captured fellow agent. He can grab new guns from dead guards and toss grenades around, but survival usually boils down to one thing: flattening himself against the nearest wall or crate to avoid hailstorms of bullets, and then popping out to squeeze off a few rounds when it looks like he has a clear shot. It should be instantly familiar to anyone who's played *Uncharted,* and—aside from Hayden's mildly frustrating inability to back-pedal quickly or blind-fire around corners—it's a pretty satisfying way to blast through the smarter-than-usual enemies.

Once you've learned the basics (and used an RPG to blow a Lasrian attack chopper out of the sky), the real fun begins. After coming face-to-face with the masterminds behind the chaos in Lasria, Hayden is infected by the Technocyte virus,



The Glaive is good for more than just throwing—it's also useful for close, gruesome finishers.



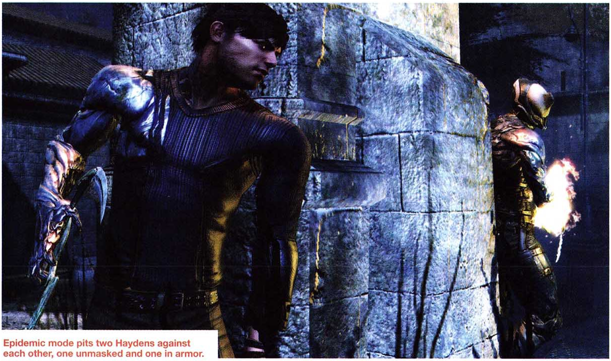
The bosses might all have exploitable weaknesses, but they can still knock you for a loop.

which has turned most of Lasria's population into metal-skinned monsters. In Hayden's case it turns out to be beneficial as it brings the game into full color, gives him access to an evolving arsenal of superpowers and—most important of all—grants him the Glaive.

Straight Up and Gory

What follows is a mostly linear third-person crawl through darkened tunnels, (mostly) abandoned buildings, post-apocalyptic city streets, and extra-creepy churchyards. Sometimes you'll be alone, collecting items, and solving simple puzzles, but most of the time you'll be locked in life-or-death struggles with heavily armed, gasmask-wearing militiamen, misshapen metallic zombies or smarter, more evolved monstrosities that can turn invisible and hurl fiery shotgun blasts from their hands. There are even a few huge bosses, all of the "learn the trick to uncover their weakness" variety, and these make for a fun challenge—up until the final battle, anyway, which feels like trying to thread multiple needles while being shoved repeatedly by a battalion of dumb jerks.

Combat tends to alternate between tense urban shootouts—which will keep you on your toes hunting for cover as enemies toss grenades and try to outflank you—and grueling set-pieces in which you're stopped in your tracks fighting off wave after wave of dumb, charging zombies. The latter can get irritating, but somehow they never quite edge over into being tedious or frustrating. It's too fast and gory for that, and the tight, over-the-shoulder perspective means getting swarmed by freaks is too full of nasty surprises to be boring.



Epidemic mode pits two Haydens against each other, one unmasked and one in armor.

The Glaive reminds us of the weapon from the movie *Krull*...which reminds us of how ripped off we felt after we left the theater! *Grr.*

Glaive-on-Glaive Action

Aside from its single-player campaign, *Dark Sector* is rounded out by multiplayer action that—while lacking the longevity of, say, *Call of Duty 4*—is actually a lot of fun. Supporting up to ten players, it features five maps and two modes: Infection and Epidemic. In Infection, one player is Hayden—fully powered up, but with no aftertouch control over the Glaive—while the rest are gasmask-wearing troopers who need to work as a team to bring him down. Whoever kills Hayden—which can only be done by getting close and snapping his neck—becomes him in the next round.

In Epidemic, meanwhile, there are two Haydens, one for each team. The object here is for each team to protect their Hayden, while at the same time trying to kill the opposing one. Again, whoever kills Hayden gets to become their team's Hayden in the next round. The rounds are fast, the action is furious and—when you're Hayden—there's nothing quite like turning invisible and repeatedly slitting your opponents' throats.

Infection mode tasks up to nine troopers with taking down one Hayden. Believe us, it's a fair fight.

The Glaive's a pretty nasty weapon—so says the chap being separated from his arm.

Dark Sector's developer, Digital Extremes, previously partnered with Epic Games to create *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament.* Now, that's a resume.

Cleave Ho

Again, the Glaive helps maintain the interest in any combat situation. This sharp-edged contraption starts out as little more than a bladed boomerang, but it quickly evolves into a versatile piece of death-dealing hardware. Right off the bat, you can use it up close to hack at enemies or stab them in dramatically gruesome finishing moves, or just throw it with the R2 trigger. Holding down R2 and then releasing it at just the right second unleashes a power throw, which can break locks and chop foes into gruesome halves. Tapping and holding R2 after you've thrown it puts you into aftertouch mode, which enables you to guide the Glaive's flight in slow motion by tilting the controller (or, if that's not your thing, by moving the right analog stick). This isn't just a cool way to slice off heads and legs—it's also instrumental in getting at enemies who are cowering behind cover, hitting switches behind fences, and exploring areas that Hayden can't reach by conventional means.

Later, you'll be able to charge the Glaive temporarily with electricity, fire or freezing powers, just by chucking it at live wires, open flames, or iced-over coolant containers. While these powers can be used to electrocute enemies, immolate them, or freeze them solid, they also come in handy for opening electronic locks, burning down plant-like walls, and turning trickles from leaky pipes into columns of icy cover.

PS3 | R

Heavy Arms

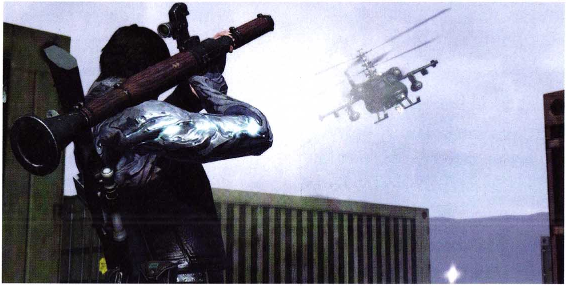
While the Glaive is Hayden's most versatile weapon, it's by no means the only tool in his ass-kicking arsenal. As he progresses and grows more powerful, he'll also be able to bust out a bubble shield to deflect projectiles—especially useful when you're pinned down by machine guns or rocket fire—and he'll even be able to turn invisible for short bursts, making it easy to outflank covering enemies or just surprise monsters with a quick Glaive finisher. He'll also be able to carry around two upgradeable guns at a time—a handgun that he'll use in tandem with the Glaive, and a rifle-type weapon—along with a fistful of grenades, which can be thrown easily (and accidentally) by nudging the L2 trigger.

While you can grab guns from defeated enemies, they usually carry locks that limit their usability to around 20 seconds. So you'll need to buy new firearms from black marketers, whom you'll find under conspicuously gleaming manholes. Their wares range from tricked out pistols and submachine guns to sawed-off shotguns and futuristic assault rifles, and you can buy and store as many as you want, provided you've got enough rubles.

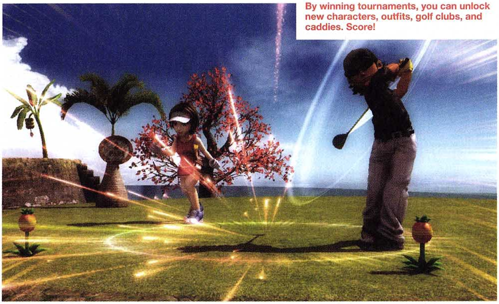
Although it's extremely linear, occasionally irritating, and lacks the crap-your-pants scariness that its eerie environments and grotesque enemies suggest, *Dark Sector* is still an enjoyably intense shooter with a lot of unique twists. It runs smoothly and looks amazing on the PS3, and the Glaive provides a uniquely thrilling feel as you fling it around the environment, particularly when you're guiding it through necks in slow motion. Throw in some awesome (if limited) multiplayer and a series of Xbox-style "Entitlements" for pulling off achievements like 30 aftertouch kills, and *Dark Sector* was worth the long wait.

Mikel Reparaz

★★★★



You won't get to keep the rocket launchers, but somehow they're always there when you need them.



By winning tournaments, you can unlock new characters, outfits, golf clubs, and caddies. Score!

The multiplayer lobby for *Out of Bounds* is adorable. You unlock customizable gear (like a tricycle!) for your avatar through the Single-Player Challenge mode.

Hot Shots Golf:

Out of Bounds

Don't like golf? You can still enjoy this delightful game

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEJ / Clap Hanz

A blend of cartoon graphics, pick-up-and-play accessibility, and surprising depth has dubbed the *Hot Shots Golf* series the sports game for golfers and non-golfers alike. In *Out of Bounds,* Clap Hanz evolves those core gameplay elements to make the title even more intuitive.

Out of Bounds introduces the Advanced Shots control scheme, which is still reflex-based; but instead of staring at a power bar, you tap a button when your character pulls back their club for a swing. The height of the club determines the strength of the shot. Next, a circle shrinks in toward your ball—tap the X button when the circle's exactly on the ball for the sharpest aim. If you're slow or impatient, the ball goes wide. The new system is instinctive, simple to learn, yet intense, and we love how it allows us to engage with both our character and the environment.

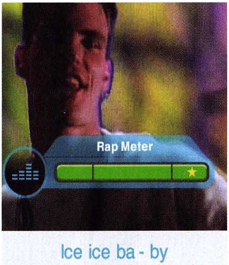
We also love the wacky and eccentric touches like caddies that chase balls at lightning speed, "rustle" and "clap" sound effects that appear as written text, and the realistic PS3 caliber terrains which should seem discordant with cartoon characters hacking on them, but don't. That's not to say the game exchanges gameplay depth for a pretty exterior. Before you swing, you take into account factors like wind, slope, and obstacles. You can also switch clubs, activate power boosts or add spin to your shots; so hardcore golfers should find enough customizability to interest them, at least initially. The game also introduces a new points system that rewards stylish golfing.

Out of Bounds' multiplayer is much like its single-player, except you're competing in an eight-player match or a 50-player tournament. If you've never swung a club in your life, *Out of Bounds* makes perfecting your golf game easy—maybe a little *too* easy. Though we find the game relaxing and enjoyable overall, the numerous tournaments and cups do become a tad repetitive after a while.

Teresa Dun

★★★★

These "fashionable" plaid pants prove that *HSG: Out of Bounds* is a true golf simulation.



View and ridicule the original music videos or insert yourself onscreen with EyeToy compatibility and let your friends do the mocking.

SingStar '90s

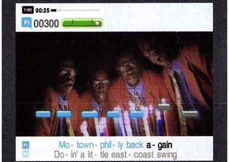
There's a reason why microphone rhymes with alone

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ($49.99 with microphones) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEE London Studio

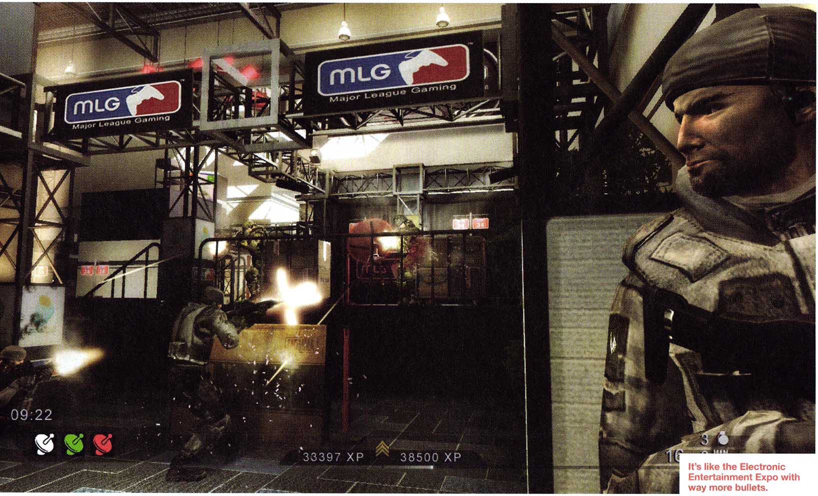
Judging the true merits of *SingStar '90s* is difficult because it's not really the game that provides the entertainment value. Rather, it's a means to an end—if you have talented friends or even better, untalented ones willing to embarrass themselves in public, *SingStar* offers memorable party fun. If you have no friends, the game's visual pitch display may help improve your singing, but your social life will still be flat. The other pertinent consideration is whether the 30 included '90s songs rock your world. Only a handful of the songs in this *SingStar* iteration held any personal appeal, but music tastes do vary and commendably, a complete song list is printed on the back of the game box.

Roger Burchill

★★★


TIME 00:25
P1 00300
Mo - town - phil - ly back a - gain
Do - in' a lit - tle east - coast swing

Party modes like Pass the Mic, Battle, and Duet add variety to the karaoke action.


MLG
Major League Gaming
MLG
Major League Gaming
09:22
33397 XP
38500 XP

It's like the Electronic Entertainment Expo with way more bullets.

Every weapon in any Tom Clancy title has been "Clancy-proofed," meaning it actually exists or is a prototype in development.

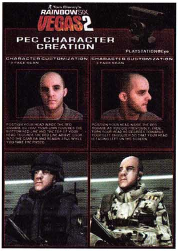
PS3 | R

Tom Clancy's

Rainbow Six Vegas 2

Now this is how you finish a war on terror

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal


Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
VEGAS 2
PEC CHARACTER CREATION
PLAYSTATION®Eye
CHARACTER CUSTOMIZATION
CHARACTER CUSTOMIZATION

The deadliest new weapon in Vegas 2? Your ugly mug.

Still no strippers.

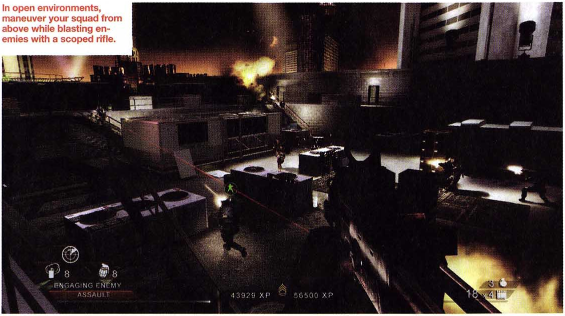
That may be the only valid complaint when it comes to *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas 2,* a rip-roaring ride of a sequel that improves upon the original in every way, ranking it just behind *Call of Duty 4* as the best shooter on the PlayStation 3.

A bold claim, yes, but *Vegas 2* is one helluva package, featuring a gritty single-player campaign, fully-integrated online co-op play, and arguably the most robust versus multiplayer on the console—the best value in Vegas since the buffet at the Imperial Palace.

Vegas 2 kicks off in an unlikely place: a 2005 hostage negotiation in the Pyrenees. You start by using the deep player creator to customize Bishop, a grizzled Rainbow veteran tasked with disarming the situation, as well as training raw recruits Logan Keller and Gabriel Nowak. As detailed in the original *Vegas,* Keller will go on to save Sin City from total destruction while Nowak will betray Team Rainbow and side with the terrorists. This flashback is a clever way to introduce new *Rainbow* players to its intricate brand of tactics via lessons to Keller and Nowak, and give some background as to why Nowak sold out his squad. Hint: He's a great big jerk.

Vegas 2 really gets going when you fast-rope into old Las Vegas at the same time Keller is tracking terrorist Irena Morales in Mexico. We'll leave the finer plot points for you to discover on your own, but rest assured that you'll put bullet holes in most of southern Nevada, from the convention center set up for a Major League Gaming tournament to the city monorail and, you betcha, to the casino floor. A thinking man's shooter, *Vegas 2* is all about realistic squad-based tactics and ending terrorist threats one room at a time. How you do so is up to you, as there are usually several doors, windows and rappelling points into any hot spot. As such, coordination with Bravo team agents Michael Walker and Jung Park is key.

Early on, you run into a crew of bad guys holding a family hostage. After slipping a fiber optic snake camera (with Sixaxis control, if you like) under the door and tagging enemy positions, call in to HQ for a satellite thermal scan to spot any enemy heat signatures you may have missed. Then, using the most intuitive squad interface around, simply point and click to move your two-man team into place, or use a headset to issue voice commands. Be sure to order your team to hold fire so one of your mates doesn't shoot early, negating the element of surprise. Finally, lob a non-lethal flash-bang grenade through a window and, in the parlance of anti-terror teams everywhere: "Go! Go! Go!"



In open environments, maneuver your squad from above while blasting enemies with a scoped rifle.

It's this kind of choice and stellar level design that sets *Rainbow Six* apart, and Ubisoft has all but perfected this brand of tactical gameplay. As such, only minor game adjustments were made, most notably a sprint button that allows you to hustle from cover to cover or to avoid grenades. The revolutionary cover system remains intact—simply press and hold L1 next to an object to slide seamlessly into third-person view, allowing you to line up shots with ease.

The level of detail in each environment is simply astounding, from restaurant menus with actual items and prices to the Stairmasters in a local gym. The lighting, especially when using thermal goggles, is superb. The sound effects also raise the experience bar. Every weapon looks, sounds, and feels perfect. There are few sounds more satisfying than the muffled pop of a silenced pistol followed by the splash of terrorist brains (and the sweet-looking blood splatters on the wall).

Story mode co-op has been reduced from four players to two, and only team leader Bishop can issue orders. But a human buddy—able to jump in and out seamlessly over PSN—makes room clearing and planning that much more enjoyable. Four-player co-op is still playable in "Terrorist Hunt" where scores of enemies lurk across the 13 multiplayer maps in what boils down to a skirmish mode. Of course, *Vegas 2,* like its predecessor, sports rocking versus multiplayer with several team-based modes as well as ye olde deathmatch. The best part? Experience points earned in multiplayer now carry over to story mode and vice versa, so you'll be a colonel in no time.

Probably the only thing that holds *Vegas 2* back from true perfection is its ridiculous challenge. The later stages on the normal difficulty setting can devolve into a frustrating cycle of trial and error, and this will surely alienate more casual players.

All told, *Vegas 2* is packed with content and is a must-have for all but the most casual shooter fans. Just like any good trip to Vegas, the sights and sounds will absolutely assault your senses. Book your visit today.

Jonathan Miller

★★★★½

The slick cover system is simply the best ever made.

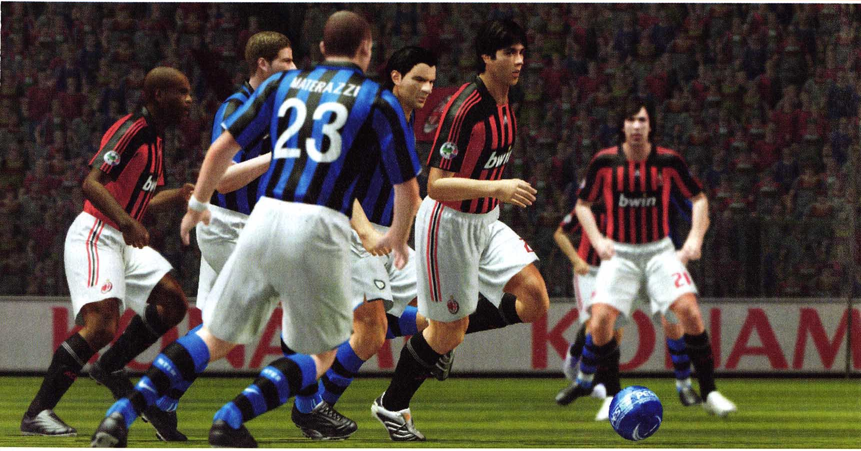
Coinkydink?

Virtual terrorists weren't the only ones angry to see Team Rainbow cross the city limits of Las Vegas. Mayor Oscar Goodman tried to block the release of the original *Rainbow Six Vegas* because he felt, without ever having seen or played the game, that the terrorist plot would hurt the city economically. Coincidentally, in *Vegas 2,* Ubisoft Montreal designed a state-of-the-art virtual recreation center, complete with climbing wall, swimming pool, and indoor basketball, named the Goodman Center. No word on whether the two are related, but it's not long into the game before the Goodman Center becomes a high-priority terrorist target.

08:13
9 ALPHA TEAM
5 BRAVO TEAM
37912 XP
38500 XP

This is the end of the line for the Vegas setting. Next stop Reno?

Does your gun have a name? We call our SR25SD sniper rifle with integrated silencer the "Quiet Storm." Or Betsy.



The Milan derby, Inter versus AC, in all its accurate teams, accurate player glory, since the Italian league is one of a few with all the real names.

PS3 | R

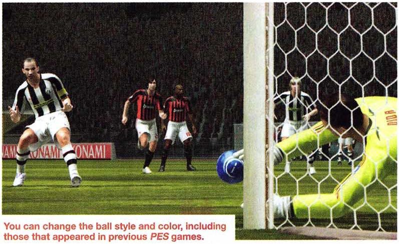
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

STOP! Like peace, give soccer a chance

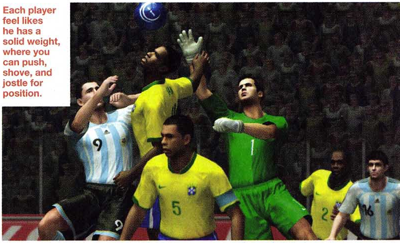
PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Konami

Please don't skip over these two pages just because it's about a soccer game. First, we put a lot of effort into playing, assessing, writing, as well as designing the layout, and investing in the pages among all the possible PlayStation coverage we could consider. Second, we tapped *PES* (as it's known to its friends) as one of the bona fide Top Ten PS3 Games of 2008 in our January issue. And third, the final release is really good, and despite what many of you might initially surmise, it's worth investigating even if soccer and its associated sims aren't your "thing."

It's true that EA's *FIFA* franchise, in all its iterations, has dominated soccer gamers' mindshare in the U.S. Overseas, where the indigenous audiences eat, sleep, and breathe soccer in the way ice-hardened Wisconsinites worship the Packers, Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer* has claimed the throne for its own. And it's a title well-earned. The fundamental playability of past years' iterations have worked to positive effect, making *PES* a must-have in the way those same cheeseheads devour *Madden* on day one of its release. That focus is evident in the teams and players available. *PES 2008* is undeniably Euro-centric. Its leagues are made up of the top European options, but licensing shenanigans continue to deny the better on-field experience *(PES* vs. *FIFA)* full access to the top team names. Fans of Italy's Serie A or Spain's La Liga will be thrilled with the accurate team names, insignias, and players. But if MLS is spiking your interest in professional soccer, you're SOL in *PES.* Though U.S. soccer stars like Clint Dempsey and Brian McBride are available in the English League team that equates to their contract owners, Fulham, the actual U.S. national



You can change the ball style and color, including those that appeared in previous *PES* games.



Each player feel likes he has a solid weight, where you can push, shove, and jostle for position.

team is populated by names clearly created by a machine that spits out random letters. It's weird and disappointing for American audiences.

For us European ex-pats, we can use the extensive editing tool to change the name of Merseyside Red to the rightful Liverpool or Wearside to Sunderland, and even add more detail to the player names (Spaniard striker Fernando Torres has his full name included, but England's Steven Gerrard on the same team is just Gerrard). Such are the vagaries of licensing restrictions, but also such are the limitations to gamers wanting the most complete soccer coverage (the kind you can find in EA's rival, and improving, *FIFA).* Invest the time (and plug in a keyboard to speed up the process) and you can recreate your favorite league and player rosters, but it's time consuming and available without aggravation in *FIFA.*

Of course, *PES* earned its spurs and reputation on the video pitch, and its fluid soccer style is clearly displayed on this turn on PS3. The sheer volume of animations representing on-field situations is staggering. No lie, I watch eight to ten full soccer matches every week. The breadth of variety in how the ball cannons off a player, how players contextually move in specific situations, is just incredible. With no set plays to frame each minute's action, the soccer field is witness to a thousand [editor's estimate] original situations every 90 minutes. *PES* captures so many nuances as to create actual moments of shock as you question, "Did that guy just do what I think he did?"

The detail of the on-field model goes so far as the ball physics. In past iterations you could practice very specialized kicks, such as long-range dipping volleys, but the options here are more streamlined into goal efforts, set pieces, and general scrimmaging. It's worth spending significant hours here if you're going to succeed on the higher of the five difficulty levels. Such is the challenge, which requires use of all the skill buttons, and fast, almost pinball-like passing moves in order to create goal-scoring opportunities (and shooting requires an extremely deft touch).

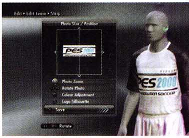
PES' signature Master League mode is still pretty robust. Though you'll pick your chosen team, it's players are a random mish-mash. On the one hand that's handy as you feel no connection in buying and selling them to improve your squad; on the other, it means that outside the badge of the club you're representing, there's little obvious emotional connection to your team (and if you know anything about being a soccer fan, then you'll know how important that is).

The Regular League and Cup modes provide the more familiar challenges. And online competition should let you test your skills against the best in the world (though from our early build, we couldn't get online with any opponents to test the core playability). We certainly got the sense that this move to PS3 wasn't smooth and maybe previous iteration functions didn't make the jump to the next-generation, hence our impressed, but guarded overall consideration. For the on-field experience, *PES* is an astounding recreation of the beautiful game, and we just hope that the license restrictions are alleviated by *09.* Rob Smith

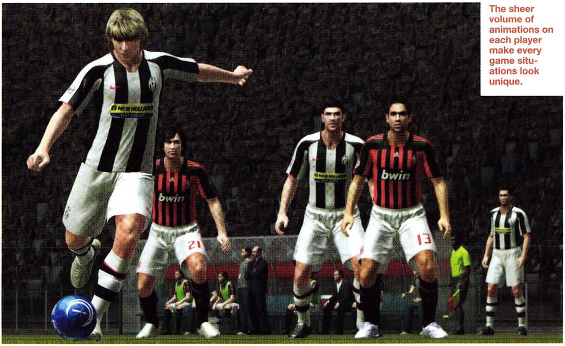
★★★★

KONAMI KONAMI

Practice free-kicks on the training field to get the skill down.



Player customization extends as far as letting you put your own face in the game.



The sheer volume of animations on each player make every game situations look unique.

SSC armor and weapons aren't standard military issue.

PS3 | R

Army of Two

One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do

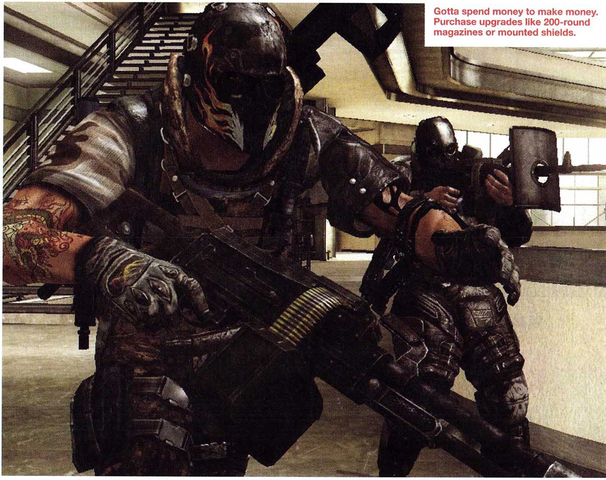
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Montreal

While Tom Clancy-approved realism is all the rage these days in the shooter genre, *Army of Two* follows a different path. So what if ripping off car doors to use as shields or killing so many enemies that you glow red is, um, not believable? While far from perfect, *Army of Two's* over-the-top co-op gameplay makes you feel like a mercenary rock star, like Eddie Van Halen with a grenade launcher.

You take control of an elite pair of private military contractors, Elliot Salem and Tyson Rios of the Security and Strategy Corporation. Following 9/11, business is booming at SSC, and Rios and Salem execute black ops that are too politically sensitive for the U.S. military—and make a small fortune in the process. But when war is your business, keeping the peace is a conflict of interest. The higher-ups at SSC would rather their bullets solve the world's problems instead of diplomacy, even if it means compromising the security of the United States.

The political climate in *AO2* is as charged as the gameplay. As either Salem or Rios (there's zero difference between the two), you navigate the battlefield using what EA calls "aggro." One player lays down

"I got your back! No really...are you okay? Hello...hello?"

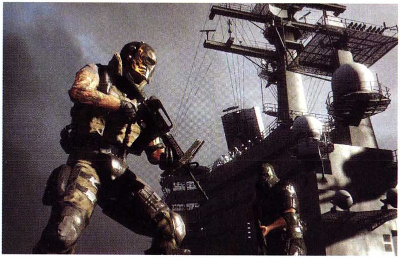


Gotta spend money to make money. Purchase upgrades like 200-round magazines or mounted shields.

EA originally designed a healing game where players used tampons to stop their partner's bleeding, but the idea was later flushed.

> “Army of Two's over-the-top co-op gameplay makes you feel like Eddie Van Halen with a grenade launcher.”

suppressing fire and draws enemy attention, freeing up his partner to flank targets or complete objectives like disarming ICBMs or sabotaging fighter jets. Issuing orders and directing the CPU-controlled partner around the battlefield works well enough, but this game is designed to be played with a friend, so go make one.



Rigged to explode, this aircraft carrier is no love boat.

That's because EA introduced a few nifty co-op maneuvers you won't find anywhere else. While tandem skydiving, for example, one player maneuvers a parachute to avoid fire while the other picks off foes with a sniper rifle. Or, when your partner is downed, you have to rush over and drag him out of the line of fire. At the same time, he has to fend off enemies so you can tend to his wounds. Every single activity—even tedious ones like opening doors—is designed with two players in mind.

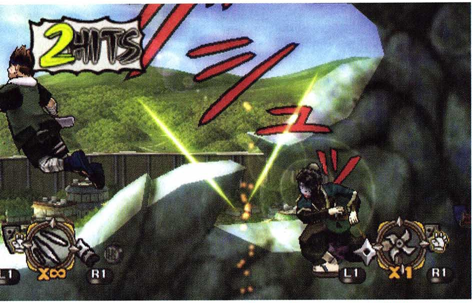
The six missions, while short, are gorgeous to look at, and our heavily armored protagonists rank right up there with the baddest-looking dudes of all time. There are problems, though. Many weapons feel weak and insubstantial despite a sweet customization system, and enemies make their share of bonehead maneuvers. Finally, playing alone pales in comparison to the co-op game. Then again, that's what EA was hoping for.

Jonathan Miller

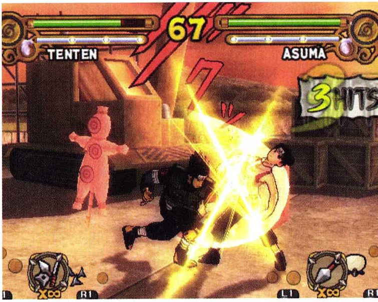
★★★½

Army of Two on Two

Army of Two's co-op focus even makes its way into versus multiplayer. The three modes—warzones, extraction, and bounties—pit two two-man teams against each other. As is often the case with mercenaries, victory is decided by how much money you've earned. Raking in the dough by completing objectives like rescuing hostages or assassinating targets is a refreshing change from traditional shooter fare. Only four versus maps made the shipping version, but EA promises more will soon be available on the PlayStation Network...for a nominal fee, of course.



Pursue a fleeing foe with a hail of throwing stars.



Manga-style kanji sound effects bring battles to life.

Naruto:

Ultimate Ninja 3

How much more ultimate can an ultimate ninja get?

PS2 **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai **DEVELOPER:** CyberConnect 2

PS2 | R

It was inevitable that *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3* would come stateside, what with it selling like Kakashi cakes (which are Kakashi Hatake-shaped pancakes, of course!) in Japan since 2005. Still, we were as skeptical as anyone about how much more ultimate another ninja-style fighting game could be after two already stellar releases in the franchise. After some serious hours pounding out jutsu, we conclude that *Ultimate Ninja 3* doesn't revolutionize the fighting genre, but it does take the series a step forward, retaining all our favorite *Naruto* flavors (like Vs. Duel and power-shopping at the Tanzaku Market) while adding a couple of welcome twists including the RPG-flavored "Ultimate Conquest" (a revamped version of "Ultimate Road" from *UN2*) and some sweet mini-games.

With 20 stages, an extensive array of characters (almost 70!), and combo-based combat, *Ultimate Ninja 3* features brawling akin to the *Super Smash Bros.* series, except that it's all based on the *Naruto* anime. Fans of the *Ultimate Ninja* series will be happy to know the combo-tastic controls work exactly as remembered: you're still "Charge Kicking" your way to victory using a variety of hurt-inflicting combos. It's still incredibly satisfying to throw, dash, wall-run, and even walk on water as you kick the snot out of your opponents with big-time combo attacks and counters. The button-pressing contests are back to decide the winner of jutsu collisions, and you still wield a variety of items including throwing stars.

For those of you with wanderlust, the Ultimate Road mode has been re-imagined as "Ultimate Contest," featuring the same RPG-based quasi-open-world feel (though this time the territory is larger and you can access rooftops and such). The introduction of a handy on-screen radar removes the need to swap back and forth between the action and the map.

Other modes include a handful of fun, albeit brief, mini-games; a sparring mode called "Iruka's Training," Capture and Shuriken modes (capture Pakkun, an unhappy-looking canine, and hit airborne junk to unlock items, respectively), and even a retrospective called "Hero's History," which lets you play through the *Naruto* anime storyline from the Genin Training to the Sasuke Retrieval story arcs. All in all, *UN3* seems fairly ultimate by most ninja standards, at least until number four comes out.

Casey Lynch

★★★★

Japanophiles will be pleased to know that it's now possible to play through the game with the original Japanese voices!

CEL-INNOVATING

Naruto isn't the first game to digitally perfect the cel-shaded cartoon look. That distinction belongs to *Jet Grind Radio* (Sega, 2000), the quirky in-line skating, graffiti-tagging tour de force on the Sega Dreamcast.

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2
THE FIRST HOKAGE
KIMIMARO

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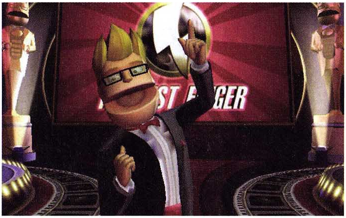
3HITS

No longer hidden in the shadows, ninja have become a colorful lot.

T HOKAGE
KIMIMARO

Anime-based games have shed their bad rep thanks to *Naruto*.



The show's wise-cracking, slightly condescending host (also named Buzz) has a head full of movie quips and Hollywood witticisms.

Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz

Think you know movies? Get Buzzed

PS2 **PRICE:** $29.99 ($39.99 with four controllers) **ESRB:** Teen
PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** SCEE

It's Saturday night, you've invited friends over, and you're preparing for an evening of potato chips, Dr. Pepper, and…movie trivia? If you're a film buff and you liked the original *Buzz! The Mega Quiz* or if you've been nursing a secret dream of starring in a game show but don't want to reveal all your hidden knowledge, then we suppose you'll get a kick out of *Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz*, because that's exactly what it is: a virtual quiz show that tests your Hollywood mettle.

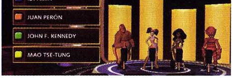
The basic premise is to answer film questions using the intuitive buzzer controller (which you buy with the game, unless you already have a set from the first *Buzz*). The game offers eight competitions, including "Fastest Finger" (answer questions about film photographs), "Hollywood Stars" (answer questions about a theme, like "Horror" or "Jennifer Lopez"), and "Fact or Fiction" (self-explanatory, we hope). The game supports up to eight controllers, and we highly suggest utilizing at least two of them—single-player is just sad and lonely.

For what it aspires to be, *Buzz* works. The show's host, movie-themed contestants, and glitzy setting culminate in an amusing, if cheesy, experience. But even with over 5,000 questions, the game lacks longevity. After playing a couple of rounds, you start to see repeats—if not in actual questions, then in recycled photos and over-emphasized actors—and the initial fizzle goes flat. Unless you and your friends adore movie quizzes, you might play once, then never take *Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz* off the shelf again.

Teresa Dun

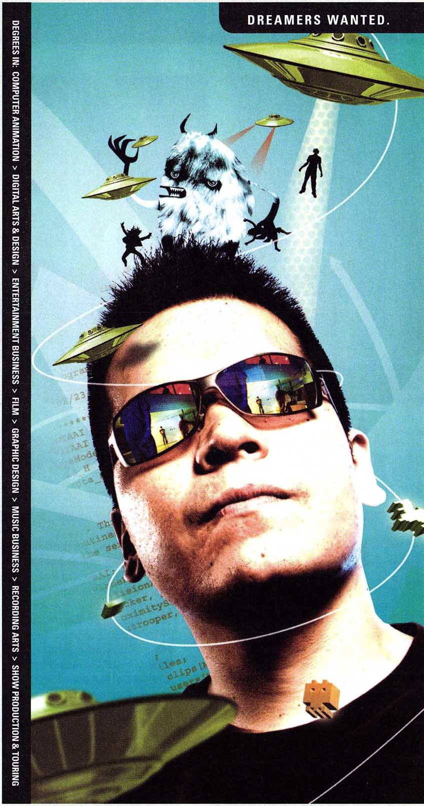
★★★

In *Buzz*, you can write your own trivia questions if you want to role-play as Quizmaster...Dork!


WHICH FORMER WORLD LEADER IS THE SUBJECT OF FOREST WHITAKER'S MOVIE 'THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND'?

- 🟦 IDI AMIN
- 🟧 JUAN PERÓN
- 🟩 JOHN F. KENNEDY
- 🟨 MAO TSE-TUNG

Definitely, Mao Tse-Tung. Dead obvious.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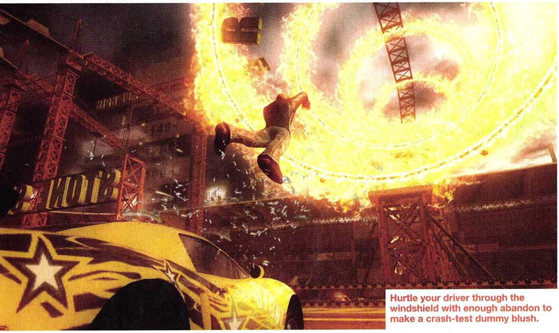
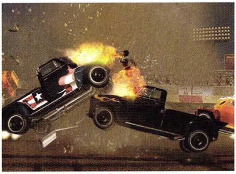
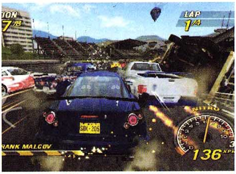


Hurtle your driver through the windshield with enough abandon to make a crash-test dummy blush.



Deathmatch Derby? Nah, just another post-deadline joyride with the PTOM crew.



Be careful on the next lap: The debris from previous laps remains on the track.

FlatOut: Head On

The crash-crazy racer makes a smashing PSP debut

PSP **PRICE:** $29.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Warner Bros. Interactive/ Empire Interactive **DEVELOPER:** Six by Nine/ Bugbear Entertainment

Don't let the name fool you—*FlatOut: Head On* has absolutely nothing to do with the headache relief product. You know the one: "HeadOn. Apply directly to the forehead!" However, that's not to say playing this smash-tastic racer won't make you feel like popping some aspirin. That's not a dig, but a complimentary testament to the intensity injected into *FlatOut's* PSP debut.

Head On hosts an insane amount of content, including an extensive list of modes, tracks, and cars. Flatout mode packs a lengthy career campaign, complete with endless options to purchase new rides and upgrades. But the real highlight is Carnage mode; introduced as a secondary option in last year's *FlatOut: Ultimate Carnage*, this addictive offering has been smartly placed front and center in *Head On*. Not only does it provide the most fun, but its fast action is perfectly paced for quick bursts of PSP play.

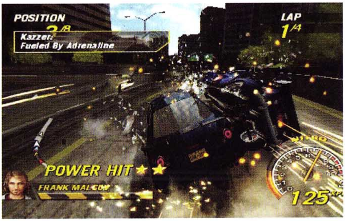
Within this mode, "Beat the Bomb" has you racing against a timed *Mission Impossible*-like fuse running atop the HUD (checkpoints and wanton destruction generously lengthen the fuse) while "Deathmatch Derby" provides a balls-out kill or be killed demolition event. The best of the bunch, though, is "Carnage Race," where you share the track with competitors as you aim for a preset targeted score; digits are racked up by destroying roadside scenery, completing air-catching stunts, and taking out other vehicles. This violence-fueled fun, combined with *FlatOut's* excellent sense of speed, makes for the game's most adrenaline-pumping moments. And with persistent debris cluttering the track, with each successive lap you'll swerve through car parts, crates, fallen fences, and downed light poles.

Head On also includes the franchise's trademark rag-doll flinging challenges, where you send drivers careening through windshields just for fun. This mini-game was starting to feel a bit stale in the series' last console outing, but has managed to tap into its original appeal again in this portable form. Graphically, *Head On* makes a decent showing with a consistent 30 fps and slick destruction effects. Background buildings, houses, and other structures look a bit blocky and smudgy up close, but you'll usually be moving too fast to notice. Sound effects deliver screeching tires, crunching metal, and screaming drivers, all providing plenty of ear-piercing resonance. Between its buckets of content and excellent presentation, *FlatOut* offers more than enough reasons for extreme race fans to buckle-up for its PSP debut.

Matt Cabral

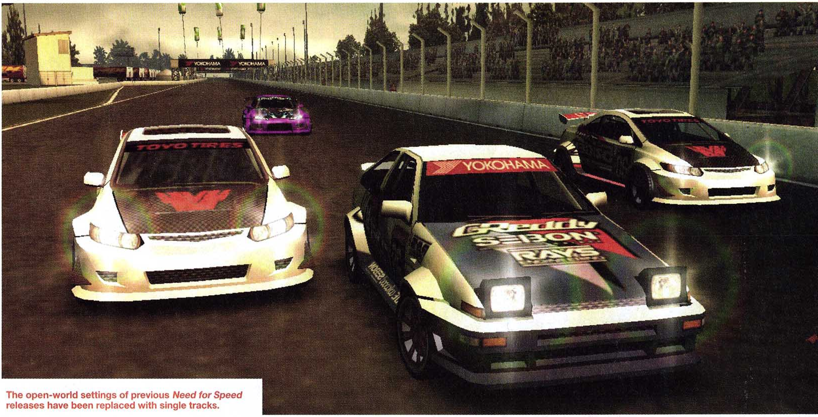
★★★★

Let's all take a moment to reflect on the sad life of a safety cone in an extreme racer.



Destruction is everything in this game: The greater the vehicular carnage, the more time or points you'll rack up.

Krystal Forscutt is the first Australian to appear as a character in *NFS*. Because we really care about her nationality.



The open-world settings of previous *Need for Speed* releases have been replaced with single tracks.

Need for Speed ProStreet

Career mode is a drag, but "quick play" accelerates the fun

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Black Box

Providing an experience that goes from addictive-fun to damned-frustrating in zero to sixty, *ProStreet* reaches the finish line with a mixed bag of options and modes. The super-challenging career mode, complete with brutal AI, punishing goals, and tons of time spent on the trial-and-error treadmill, will leave all but the most fearless lead-footers in the dust. However, the more engaging quick-play options do provide some portable racing thrills.

These jump-in-and-race challenges actually host the title's most fun and accessible levels. Standard timed and checkpoint-based races offer plenty of tire-spinning satisfaction, and a brand new speed trap mode ups the pedal-to-the-metal ante. Here, your performance is affected and judged by how quickly you tear past speed-monitoring checkpoints—complete with a speed-displaying radar gun pop-up icon. It's an addictive and welcome addition that brings a fresh layer to the annually released racer. Even better, most of these modes are supported by four-player infrastructure and ad hoc play; *ProStreet* is definitely best when you mash the pedal down against online friends.

Those looking for a deeper, extended experience can hop into the career mode. They'd better be up for the challenge, however, as *ProStreet* pulls no punches here. The career is extremely punishing and will leave unseasoned drivers very frustrated. A Weekend Warrior setting, designed with amateur drivers in mind, is hampered by an unbalanced reward system; unlocking the game's coolest cars, upgrades, and tracks demands you climb the ranks, but the trek is just too damn long. Plus, even on this "beginner's" level, the crack AI (unbearably tough on the game's two higher difficulty settings) will leave speed-demon wannabes trailing far behind.

ProStreet does deliver some of the best vehicle models ever to grace the PSP's slick screen; from their sharp details to the realistic damage they display, these cars have been generously coated with eye candy. Additionally, the worldwide selection of tracks—from the Nevada desert to the German autobahn—pack plenty of detail. Despite these impressive visuals, *ProStreet* doesn't quite pull off the all-important sense-of-speed factor. It's not without the occasional wind-in-your-hair moments, but it's the fun-siphoning career mode and the inability to deliver the sensation of speed we need that may leave some racers stuck in neutral.

Matt Cabral

★★½

PSP |

When it comes to quick-hit thrills, this game satisfies. But if you're looking for a frustration-free racing career, best look elsewhere.

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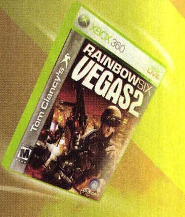
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Alternate history, same old Nazis. You'll have no problem punching them back to Berlin.

Dirty kraut invasion or Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade? Beware the dreaded assault blimps!

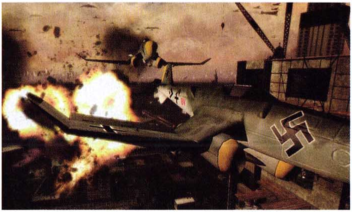
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty

No country for old Nazis

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Spark Unlimited

Like many Englishmen visiting the United States, Winston Churchill looked right when he should have looked left. While crossing 5th Avenue in New York on December 13, 1931, Churchill was struck by a taxi and suffered a scalp wound and a pair of cracked ribs. In *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty*, developer Spark Unlimited poses the question: What if Churchill had died? He wouldn't have been around to steel the British during the Nazi blitzkrieg. Britain would have surrendered; the Nazis would have conquered Europe; the United States would have remained neutral; Thomas Dewey would have been elected president in 1944; and the rest is alternate history. Unfortunately, this fascinating premise is one of *Turning Point*'s only strengths.

Fly Jet Blue. Way too many blackout dates on Luftwaffe.



Flash forward to 1953, when Nazi soldiers have gone soft after a decade of world domination, at least in terms of AI. Indeed, they pose little threat to construction worker and game hero, Dan Carson, and are perfectly happy to watch as he runs up to their faces to shoot them. Only on the hardest difficulty setting, when bullets do more damage and the Krauts suddenly learn to use the sights on their updated MP50s, is there a need to use tactics more advanced than spamming the duck button.

Visually, *Turning Point* has its moments: The landmarks of New York, Washington D.C., and London are beautifully rendered. But as they are apt to do, the Nazis ruin the scenery, this time with terrible animations. It's tough to be frightened of SS stormtroopers when they run as if auditioning for *Riverdance*.

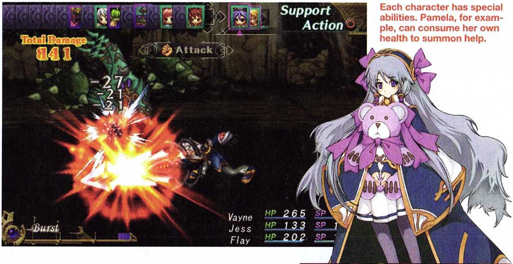
The flaws might be bearable if *Turning Point* provided some kind of storyline to expand upon its stellar premise, since seeing Nazi flags hang from the White House or New York's Chrysler Building crumble to ruins is powerful enough to inspire any red-blooded American. But while the missions are interesting—escape from New York, infiltrate the White House to assassinate the Nazi stooge president, dismantle a nuclear bomb headed to New York—the broader impact crumbles as the disjointed progression (How did I get here?) and absence of character development leave too many obvious questions unanswered. You constantly wonder why highly trained military experts chose your fine construction-worker self to single-handedly spearhead the American resistance, and you never get an answer.

The eight-person multiplayer is clearly a throwaway, with a handful of uninspired maps and only deathmatch and team deathmatch modes. No, *Turning Point* has the overall feel of another bad WWII shooter with a fresh—albeit fascinating—coat of paint. Our advice? Turn away.

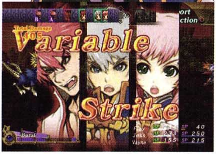
Jonathan Miller

★★

A recent online list ranked Hitler as the No. 2 most evil man in history behind Joseph Stalin. Sorry Adolf, you can't win 'em all.



Each character has special abilities. Pamela, for example, can consume her own health to summon help.



The long bar of cards at the top of the screen shows the order of turns. You can also swap in other characters during battles.

To make campus life more exciting, you can spread gossip (which has a tangible effect on your abilities) and participate in part-time jobs.

Mana Khemia:

Alchemists of Al-Revis

Turn-based combat is still alive

PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: Gust

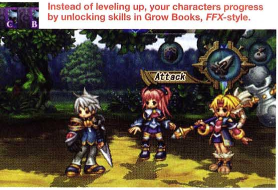
Becoming an alchemist isn't merely tossing herbs into a cauldron. As the students of *Mana Khemia*'s Al-Revis Academy discover, it's also about honing battle skills, making friends, and overcoming personal demons (like a penchant for causing explosions...a potentially deadly habit for an aspiring alchemist). A charming mix of school sim and turn-based RPG, the gameplay consists of guiding the orphan Vayne Aurelius through his three years at school and is delivered with NIS's signature darling sprite graphics and perky music. The combination of the light-hearted story, crafting-driven gameplay, and turn-based combat creates an experience that's familiar, fun, and addictive.

As a sort-of successor to the *Atelier Iris* series (the alchemy is the same, but the school setting is new), *Mana Khemia* revolves around crafting better and better items, and that's one of the game's most charming aspects. You run, jump, and slash your way through monster-packed terrain to gather raw materials. Then, you bring those ingredients back to your workshop, play a reflex-based mini-game to imbue them with status effects (like elemental spells or stat boosts), and craft them into more useful items like steel or cloth. Afterwards, you combine those items into armor and weapons. The attributes of your gear depend on the effects you earned during the mini-games, allowing for a vast array and diversity in customization. You can, for example, arm your damage-dealing characters with a sword that gives an "attack up" boost or adorn your magic-wielders with a dress that bestows healing spells. We loved the mechanic so much that we spent hours just re-synthesizing items to optimize our gear.

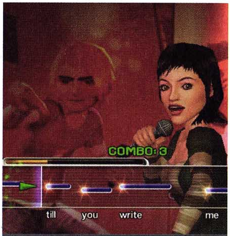
The battle system is turn and party-based, with a Burst meter that enables powerful effects when maxed. Yes, it feels dated, but traditional RPG fans (like us) won't have a problem with the slower pace. The story and characters feel like they fell straight out of an anime, so they're a little cliché, but when we turn on the Japanese dubs, we still can't resist them. *Mana Khemia* is hardly innovative, but if you're a fan of classic Japanese-style RPGs, you don't want to miss it.

Teresa Dun

★★★½



Instead of leveling up, your characters progress by unlocking skills in Grow Books, *FFX*-style.



Plug in the EyeToy to map your ugly mug to the performer onscreen. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Karaoke Revolution Presents:

American Idol Encore

Now, with 100-percent more Paula

PS2 PRICE: $49.99 with microphone ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Blitz Games

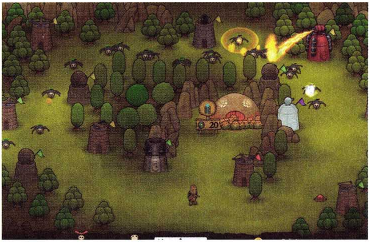
When it comes to party games, *Karaoke Revolution* ranks right up there with "naked twister." *American Idol Encore* does not disappoint with 40 new songs, an eight-player Idol mode, and EyeToy connectivity. This time around the enchantingly overmedicated Paula Abdul is in, and so are the "What's up, Dawg-isms" of Randy Jackson and the gloomy criticism of dream-killer Simon Cowell. The formula remains the same: hit the correct pitch to earn points, string together combos, and sing your heart out all the way to Hollywood. There are still no master tracks, but this is about finding your own voice, or, in this case, Elton John's. Hold me closer, Tony Danza!

Jonathan Miller

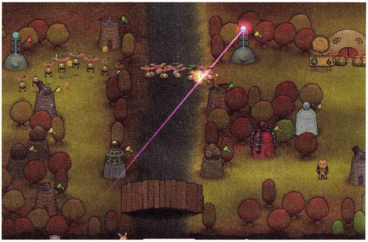
★★★½

Scores to Beat
12500
2000
Glamorous
Loading
Gameplay Tip: A three-note com
song is difficult to sing, while a o
song is easier.
Konami
Vocal Judging: expert

The crowd might be on your side, but don't expect Simon to show you any love.



The fire tower is great even against fast moving enemies.



This laser tower will level up on its own fairly quickly.

» DEVELOPER STRATEGY

EASY TO LEARN, DIFFICULT TO MASTER

How can a simplistic little game be so darn tough? Q-Games' President and Executive Producer Dylan Cuthbert shares his ten favorite *PixelJunk Monster* tips. (And Teresa pipes in, too.)

1. Dance, Dance, Dance

Learn to dance-upgrade your towers to at least red. In some cases, you can even dance the towers up to black—it's better than spending gems on the upgrades, but it can take time. **Teresa says,** "Make sure to upgrade your cannons, especially early on!"

2. Arrow Tower Tricks

The arrow towers shoot at the first enemy to come into their range and tend to kill weak spiders with one shot. If you place arrow towers too close together, they might target the same enemy, which would be a waste of a shot. For early waves, spread your arrow towers apart. **Teresa says,** "The principle is even more true for cannons! They take longer to reload, so a wasted shot is even more detrimental to your overall strategy."

3. Cannon Interruptus

If you time the building of your cannon just right—like when a group of the little walnut things comes along—it'll fire right into the center of the crowd, inflicting maximum damage. If the tower is already built, it'll fire at the first walnut to come into range, which means you only knock out the edge of the crowd. **Teresa says,** "Cool! I never thought of that strategy."

4. Coin Collecting

Be sure to collect all coins by the time the last monster of the wave is killed and interest is awarded. It's very important to judge the timing of that last monster's death to maximize your score. **Teresa says,** "I never worry about the score. I just want to Rainbow every stage."

5. Interest

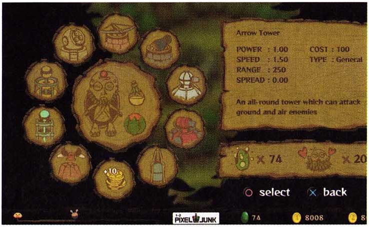
All interest earned at the end of waves is added to your score; taking advantage of this by upgrading is all-important for getting a high score. Also, any coins dropped because you bumped into a monster or sold a tower are deducted from your score, so make sure to pick them all up! **Teresa says,** "Never underestimate the power of compound interest...in real life or in PJM. Also, you earn gems as well as coins by destroying purple or black towers."

6. Tesla Towers

Some stages have been designed with the Tesla tower in mind—the Tesla tower is remarkably effective if the tree it is built on is jutting out slightly from the rest or on a tight corner that the monsters file past on either side. Upgrading the Tesla gives it incredible range, and it attacks every enemy that comes within range. **Teresa says,** "The Tesla releases a high voltage electrical attack on ground units. Personally, I prefer the fire tower to the Tesla. The fire tower costs more, but it also has better range and cool fire-spewing effects."

7. Ice Towers

Ice towers get a bad rap, but when they're upgraded they will slow down an entire group of monsters. Combining them with a fire tower or even just a group of cannon towers can make short work of even the toughest swarm of bad guys. **Teresa says,** "I never use the ice tower...is it really that good?"


Arrow Tower

POWER : 1.00
SPEED : 1.50
RANGE : 250
SPREAD : 0.00
COST : 100
TYPE : General

An all-round tower which can attack ground and air enemies

Examine tower stats to see which ones are right for your play style.

8. L1 and Results Graph

Sort of a double-tip, L1 shows you the current level of all the towers on the screen. Choose the towers that are closest to max when you dance to upgrade them. The results graph at the end of the game shows you the waves you did the worst on. If you simply remember those particular waves for next time and prepare for them, you can get a Rainbow more easily.

Teresa says, "I agree with upgrading strategically! But it's not just a matter of which tower is closest to getting its next level. It's also about what type of tower your strategy relies on, which wave you're on, and what monsters are coming next."

9. The Hive

The hive tower is idiosyncratic—the insect bat-type things that fly out of the hive will start flying toward your location at the time they launched, so you need to wander around in advance and position yourself where you want them to attack the enemy. Upgrading the hive increases the number of creatures that can fly about simultaneously.

Teresa says, "It's hard to master the hive tower mechanics because you're so busy doing other stuff that you can't direct the insects toward the enemy paths. But it does attack both air and land units."

10. Laser Towers

The laser towers fire from the little bulb on their top, so you need to place them where that bulb lines up with the monsters' routes. Basically, you need to look at the range circle and draw a line mentally along the route to the bulb. The tower will fire as soon as a monster breaches the range circle and you want to fire along the route to hit as many monsters as possible.

Teresa says, "That's a good way of envisioning it. Remember that laser towers have a long range, so I like to put one along the enemy path but close enough to provide last-minute air defenses at my home base, too."

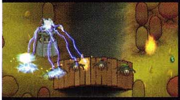
PJM's odd art style is part of what makes it so delightful!

TERESA'S **PIXELJUNK MONSTER** TIPS

Oh, *PixelJunk Monsters*, you're such a tease. I think I'm about to Rainbow a level, but at the 18th wave, one measly spider breaks through my gazillion defenses, and I have to start all over. And yet, I can't tear myself away. After pouring countless hours into the game, I have some advice for other frustrated lovers, er, gamers.

Educate Yourself

Enemies in *PJM* have weaknesses. Fast-moving spiders and bats fall prey to arrows while over-inflated bumblebees are weak to laser towers. Figure out which towers are effective against which enemies. Helpful hint: I find fire towers effective against green- and blue-shielded units, and cannons or mortars against the red-shielded ones.



Just as important as knowing your enemy, however, is knowing your towers. You don't have the gems or time to upgrade all your towers, so you have to pick and choose. First, familiarize yourself with the Range, Speed, Spread, and Power icons. Depending on the tower, each upgrade activates a unique bonus, and some aren't worth it.

Next, figure out your strategy. Against air units, I prefer to rely on laser towers—thus, I rarely upgrade my anti-air, but I get my lasers to black as soon as possible. For ground units, I use a mix of cannons, arrows, and fire towers, and only build mortar towers when I know the boss is coming.

Understand Positioning

Positioning is key. I like to position my cannons and arrows up front and my longer-ranged anti-air guns behind them. Cannons located at a "turn" can defend more ground (and thus level up faster, too). If you build a mortar tower, make sure it can reach as many parts of the enemies' path as possible.

To reiterate what Dylan said, don't waste shots! If you put two cannons too close together, they'll both fire at the same enemy (when a single shot would've killed it) and the ones behind it will slip through unharmed. It's better to "alternate" cannon positions.

Also, I always put some arrows near my home base. You never know what might weasel past the other towers, and arrows are fast and attack both land and air units.

Be Frugal!

Conserve money! Don't build unnecessary towers, especially at the start. Instead, make each tower count. Try to collect every single coin and gem, and try not to spend the coins until you've earned interest on them. If you no longer need a tower, destroy it and collect the cash.

If you need to upgrade a tower to black, dance until yellow at the very least before you spend the gems. Remember, you need the gems to unlock new towers, too.

Rainbow Power

That's it in a nutshell. Always look ahead at what's coming. Never stand around idly—with all the different tasks, you should have your hands more than full. Now go Rainbow every stage and show *PixelJunk Monsters* who's the boss!

Network Strategy Deception, Surprise, and a Plan of Attack

EXCLUSIVE

MONSTER MADNESS CHALLENGES

SouthPeak's quirky cartoon action game serves up fun, stylish challenges, and we've got the skinny on how to get your gang through them all.

We got hands-on time with *Monster Madness*, and color us intrigued. It might be easy for this one to fly under the radar, but the multiplayer action in particular illustrated some fun times, comedy moments, and general teenagers-with-big-inventive-weapons mayhem. You and your buddies are fighting nefarious monsters for their suburban lifestyle, and have to use a variety of creative methods to dispatch said intruders. The top-down visuals are colorful, the characters are stylish and stylized, and the gameplay mechanic is pick-up-and-play simple.

The game features 25 unique challenges, each requiring specific characters to perform certain tasks. Successfully completing these single-player events unlocks accessories and outfits that can adorn your character as you take them online. Here's your ultimate survival guide.

White Water Swanning

- Swans are big, stupid birds. A cheerleader riding a rental swan is an equally stupid combination. Take Little Miss Popular and her novelty rental boat out for a ride on the white water rapids. Achieve the fastest time while riding through the gold markers to gain top score. Be careful, though, since these rental boats and dumb blondes are susceptible to hitting rocks and other obstacles.

UFO Shooter

- Fly the unfriendly skies in your very own UFO! Stolen directly from the alien invaders of Planet X, your trusty flying saucer is a state-of-the-art kick-butt machine. Maneuver through enemy fire and set your plasma guns to destroy as you plow through the ranks of Planet X, and even take on the Prince of Darkness himself.

Slice and Dice

- How to make a Super Zack: 1) Give him mushrooms, 2) Throw him down a drain pipe, 3) Make him run through this training course. Teach Zack to jump and duck like his favorite plumber as he attempts to prove that he, too, is a videogame hero. Avoid the amputation of your legs or head by learning to time your jumps just right.

Witch Hunt

- Life is a witch in Witch Hunt. Stop these sexy dark magicians from turning our sexy blonde into something inhuman, like a food-service worker. Punch these broomstick-flying ladies by slapping them frozen until they disappear. Be hasty, however, since their fellow witches are quick to break the ice. Use this to your advantage to ambush as many witches as possible.

Lava Battle

- Battle your way out of hell's entrance. The plunger is your only weapon. Defeat all 93 guardians of hell within the time limit to rank high score. Where is the Toilet Duck from heaven when you need it?

Monster Race

- Improvised weapon-making is vital when busting up the walking dead, but a souped-up lawn mower with nitrous-oxide is just plain fun. Learn to steer and stunt jump your monster killing machine. Collect as many markers as possible before time runs out. There's no traffic or pedestrians. Just you, the open road, speed, and lots of jumps!

Match 'Em

- Monster slaying takes a lot of training in awareness and focus. Teach Carrie to recognize your enemies quickly and accurately with this *Monster Madness* rendition of the classic Concentration game.

Jack Attack

- Like a Tim Burton nightmare, untalented, pumpkin-headed zombies infest your town. Control Andy as he attempts to show these pumpkin-heads how to make pumpkin pie the easy way, with a heavy stationary turret and lots of bullets.

Monster Onslaught

- The monsters are on to you and your support in the form of Larry, the local handyman and supplier of upgrades. Fight off the hordes of monsters to defend your only means of escape, Larry's truck. Remember, you are only second prize so be sure to keep the monsters away from the all-important truck while gaining weapon upgrades after each wave of enemies; you'll need them.

Castle Brawl

- So you're stuck in a medieval castle, broods of walking dead things are all around, and you have your trusty shotgun. Now what? Time to turn these deadheads into zombie Swiss cheese. Eliminate all 54 monsters using only your 12 gauge before time or ammo runs out.

Hill Defense

- So there you are, on top of a green hill on a beautiful afternoon. All of a sudden a mob of legless zombies begins its mass assault on your position.

It's time to jump into your fully loaded turret and take these crippled and lifeless creeps out for good.

Zack-man

- As if Zack hasn't played or fantasized about enough videogames, he now finds himself in one. This *Monster Madness* take on the classic *Pac-Man* has our protagonist Zack in a maze trying to collect pellets. However, there are no ghosts, just your average machete-wielding zombies. Being the hardcore gamer Zack is, he refuses to bend the rules while attacking, so he can only avoid the monsters.

Zombie Dodgeball

- These zombies have got some balls, literally. Learn to master dodging and throwing like millions of unfortunate school children all across America: through Phys. Ed. dodgeball. Don't expect the zombies to follow dodgeball regulation; they just want to take you out.

Leprechaun Round-up

- Nothing is worse than a broke Leprechaun with a bad attitude. It's time you showed these wee folk what happens when they don't pay up. Seek out and flash-freeze these stingy creeps with back slaps as cold as ice. Hit each Leprechaun to freeze them in place just long enough to score. Be sure not to stray too far away from the cold-cocked Leprechauns; their buddies are still around and quick to thaw them out.

Suburban Warfare

- Take an isolated teenager, give him a chain-gun, throw him into a zombie infestation, and you have suburban warfare. Survive the zombie assault by spraying bullets any which direction you want. Destroy all 119 undead creatures within the time limit to gain high score.

Gauntlet

- Take your character through a killer obstacle course to win this challenge. Sound too easy? Then how about some trash compactors for a little change of pace? Let's also add circular saw blades to work on that dexterity. Still too easy, you say? Then we'll also throw in some fire, just for kicks. Not as simple as it seemed, is it?

Carnage

- Zombies can really make your late-night drive suck! In said situation, there's really only one fun solution to the zombie problem: run these bastards over. Drive around your suburban neighborhood taking out zombies, witches, and a whole mess of dead things. Put as many monsters under your four wheels before the time limit expires, and be sure to boost before hitting the ramps to score big-time air.

Sort or Explode

- Andy is stuck at his new job sorting barrels from dynamite. Dispose of the explosive items by picking them up and tossing them into their corresponding disposal pit. However, placing an explosive into the wrong pit will cause the volatile pit to explode and damage Andy's ego, as well as his body. Be hasty—each item thrown to you for disposal counts down to its explosion.

Zombie Cats

- Sent back to earth by the Prince of Darkness (even he couldn't stand to be around stray cats), these evil felines are conjured up by the old cat lady from hell! Time to grab your flamethrower and turn up the heat. Like amateur back alley chefs you have to fry the strays from hell. Authentic dying cat noise included.

Death School

- Dozens of zombies are blocking the only entrance to school and you have only one weapon: your nail gun. Run around the front steps of your high school while turning all 59 zombies into failing-grade Shop Class projects.

Zombie Baseball

- It's just you and a zombie, an empty baseball field, and too much time on your hands. Swing away as the zombie pitcher attempts to relive his baseball glory days while trying to take you out. Swing at the good pitches or jump away from the bad pitches. Zombie pitcher throws the fastball from hell, complete with a hellfire trail. Score big time with long-distance drives.

Pizza Delivery

- It's business as usual for the local pizza spot. Through rain, sleet, snow, and even inter-dimensional invasion, the local pizza joint still delivers. Take Jennifer and make as much tip money as you can since monster-busting equipment is pricey. This isn't one of those chain pizza joints with their "30 minutes or less" motto; this is pizza delivery evolved.

Zombie Dance-off

- So you're a lonely zombie, fresh out of brains and looking for a good time. The local night club is pumping as usual. Teach the other zombies on the dance floor new moves in this timed rhythm mini-game. Press the corresponding buttons displayed on screen and on point. Disco isn't dead! It's just... undead.

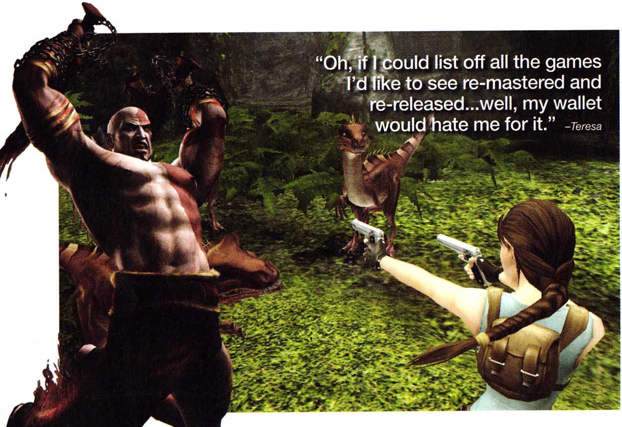
Monster Survival

- Some chainsaw-wielding maniac has challenged you to a competition—a zombie slaying competition. Varied waves of diverse monsters will keep you occupied as you try to outdo your demented counterpart. Feel free to grab something to drink if you get thirsty; soda vending machines are scattered throughout this stage. Be alert: The monsters are relentless and your counterpart's attacks are deadly to the zombies, and you.

On-ramp to Hell

- Stay on the construction platform and away from the toxic sludge down below. Take Carrie and her disc shooter and take out whatever hellish minion happens to materialize. Be sure to look out for the "Creature from the Black Latrine." Get as many kills in as little time possible to pass the event.

Letters Feedback, Insight, Critical Judgment, and Some Crazy #%@*!



"Oh, if I could list off all the games I'd like to see re-mastered and re-released...well, my wallet would hate me for it." *–Teresa*

KRATOS IN HD, PLEASE

Just as the original *Tomb Raider* was face-lifted into *Tomb Raider: Legend*...I believe that I'm not alone on the idea of *God of War* and *God of War II* being re-mastered onto Blu-ray for the PS3 with its promising graphics. Please, please, please! Plant the seed in the minds of your superiors, and if the gods are in favor of such a path, it's a path the people shall follow! Let's take a poll on it also. Plus one vote, so far!

RJ Stewart, Torrance, CA

Teresa: Plus one from me, too! Oh, if I could list off all the games I'd like to see re-mastered and re-released...well, my wallet would hate me for it. But don't you think both *God of War* titles already look impressive enough, even as PS2 games? Maybe your idea would be more convincing to Sony after another couple of generations of games.

SCORE ONE FOR GAME MUSIC

I just wanted to comment on a letter in your March 2008 issue of PTOM. The title read "Audiophiles" and discussed the idea of playing one's own music while playing games on the PS3. At first I thought this was really cool, but the more I thought about it the more it bothered me. Being a professional musician I can really appreciate the hard work that goes into composing music for movies, games, etc., and the idea of "covering up" a composer's prized compositions with Aerosmith or Guns n' Roses really hits them where it hurts. The games industry is very blessed with many good musicians and composers (Nobuo Uematsu, to name one) who have provided some incredible musical scores that seemingly get better and better as time goes on. Let's not make the mistake of leading these individuals to think that their work is not appreciated or we just might start hearing our next-gen games beginning to sound more and more like Atari or Nintendo games of old. The music is there for a reason and just as much hard work goes into crafting scores for our favorite titles as it does story and gameplay. They all combine to make the overall experience more satisfying.

Joseph, The Internet

Teresa: Oh, I so agree with you, Joseph! I love videogame music. I

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Fun Ain't Free

I love reading gaming magazines, but one persistent question I keep reading has just gotten ridiculous: "When will Sony lower the price (again) of the PS3?" Has anyone priced a decent gaming computer lately? They are a LOT more expensive than a PS3 and do not play Blu-ray DVDs! I was just showing *Unreal Tournament III* to a PC gamer last night, and he was surprised by the quality of the graphics and gameplay. Look, this quality is NOT free. You want a cheap system? Buy a Wii! You want a superior system? Save a little. You get what you pay for!

My fear is that this chorus of whiners will in the long run work against console gamers, that manufacturers in the future will relegate us to cheaper machines to avoid the complaints. In fact, we are already seeing this as Sony is now putting out less-expensive systems that don't play all PS2 games. I got news for you whiners: Life ain't free. Sony ain't working for free. You want something good, you're going to have to pay more! Now shut up and open you wallets, or move on to a system you can afford. Don't compromise my fun!

Jason Grange, Mission Veijo, CA

Roger: I like your style, Jason—maybe Mr. Money Bags can send me a few bucks to hold me over until payday? But seriously, the reason the PS3 costs so much less than a comparable gaming PC is that Sony uses the console hardware as a loss leader and makes up for it when it sells game software. As time passes and the price of chipsets goes down and economies of scale further reduce costs, Sony can afford to lower the price of the PS3 to remain competitive in the marketplace. If you really want to support your favorite platform, just buy more games—that's your free economics lesson from someone who got a "C" in the class.

"Look, we've been barely surviving on a diet of ketchup soup, moldy bread, wilted cabbage, and Oreo Cakesters..." *–Gary*

buy game soundtracks and listen to them in my car. I especially love the music in RPGs, because you're right, a ton of work goes into making those beautiful scores. However, in games that use mostly licensed music in the background (like *San Andreas*), well, I'd prefer to cruise to my own musical collection. It'd also be handy in games like *PixelJunk Monsters,* when I'm trying to Rainbow a stage I've already played 20 times and have heard the same music for hours.

FISH TALE

Last week I was sitting eating salmon in a crockerware container (you know that ceramic stuff), and when I went to a friend's house I left it up high on a ledge. Lo and behold my greyhound jumps up and tries to get at the container (my dad told me this story after I got home) and it fell on my PS3. At this point you're probably all like ZOMGZ NO WAY!!! But nothing happened. All my PS3 got was a scratch about two inches long on the top and the crockerware completely exploded! My dad and I found pieces of it on the other side of our 20x20 family room. Have you guys heard any other stories on how incredibly tough the PS3 is?

Ethan Blomquist,
Apple Valley, MN

Gary: We don't want to poke holes in your story, because we have indeed heard many other tales of PS3's great strength and resilience. But really now: You were eating "salmon." Out of "crockerware." You have "high ledges" in your home. Or should we say castle, your majesty? Look, we've been barely surviving on a diet of ketchup soup, moldy bread, wilted cabbage, and Oreo Cakesters (our one indulgence). And you, your royal highness, are eating salmon out of crockerware and bragging about it in a missive to our magazine. That, sir, is shameful. Still...it is a good question. Fellow PS3 owners, answer Ethan's call—send in your PS3 survival stories!

NO MORE CONSOLES!

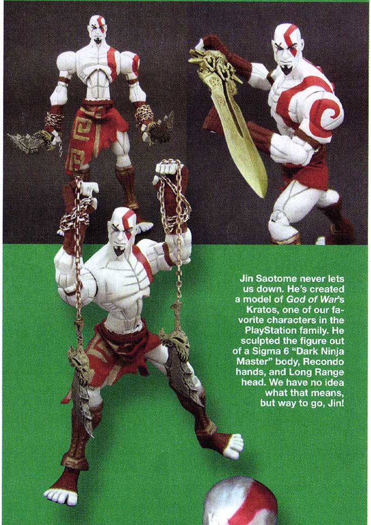
I've been having a bit of a worry about the future of gaming that started when Microsoft jumped in and made a console. After hearing rumors of Apple thinking of building a console as well, I wanted to ask: Do you think that gaming can turn into a brand-name sort of thing like computers? I really wouldn't like it if we ended up with several different brands of consoles, and I even think three is a little too crowded.

Jason Rhoades,
The Internet

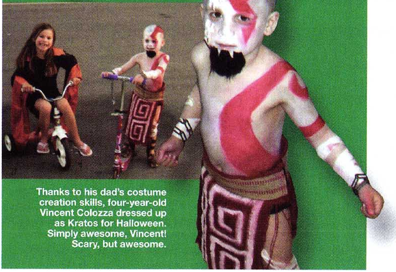
Roger: What is with you people this month? Sony shouldn't lower PS3 prices...I don't want too many choices...Competition, people! It's the backbone of the American way of life—it makes us work harder to be better to keep one step ahead. Should Apple enter the gaming arena, I think Sony will be able to handle the heat. Besides, who wants to play a bunch of games (albeit, sharply designed ones) about hugging trees and eating granola?

FAN ART

For the love of Kratos



Jin Saotome never lets us down. He's created a model of *God of War*'s Kratos, one of our favorite characters in the PlayStation family. He sculpted the figure out of a Sigma 6 "Dark Ninja Master" body, Recondo hands, and Long Range head. We have no idea what that means, but way to go, Jin!



Thanks to his dad's costume creation skills, four-year-old Vincent Colozza dressed up as Kratos for Halloween. Simply awesome, Vincent! Scary, but awesome.

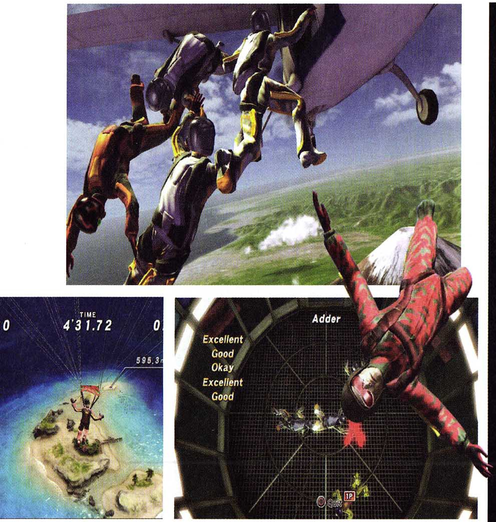
contact Send your thoughts and comments about the magazine to letters@psmonline.com. Just don't stand behind us and watch while we're working—that's just creepy.

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for the price of a venti decaf soy vanilla latte. We say Yea or Nay.

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

- **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.



Go! Sports Skydiving

PRICE: $4.99 **DEVELOPER:** Lightweight

– Who would've thought that jumping out of a plane in a parachute could be so darn dull? But in *Go! Sports Skydiving,* it is. The game features two basic modes. For Formation levels you form aesthetically pleasing figures with other divers while falling through the air (like synchronized swimming in the clouds). You use the Sixaxis' motion sensor to "move" into place, but the controller either registers your movements too strongly (and your character spins out of control) or else it doesn't pick up your movements at all. The Landing levels require you to perform airborne somersaults to rack up points, pull out your parachute, and then glide over to the landing zone, which bored us after our second successful landing. The entire experience feels like a Sixaxis gimmick—we don't recommend it.

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite downloads from the PlayStation Store this month:

LAIR THEME

We may not have cared much for *Lair* as a game, but we're loving the *Lair* Asylian theme. Not only are the lighting and art beautiful, but the theme randomly switches between three background images. Best of all, it's free. We like free.

Kickin' It Old School

+ High-definition graphics, open-world crowd environments, and sandbox gameplay are the fad in today's games. But do you remember what games were like ten, even twenty years ago, when kids had to bring bags full of coins to dimly lit arcades just to get their gaming fix? If you want to take a walk down memory lane (or for the younger generation, a quick lesson on the history of gaming), the PlayStation Network offers a good alternative to tracking down old arcade machines. For $4.99 apiece, you can enjoy arcade classics in your own living room. Remember, you can also play these games multiplayer via the PSN. Here are the ones we like most.

Q*bert

ORIGINALLY RELEASED: 1982
GENRE: Action
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2

Quick age check: If you think *Q*bert* looks like a nifty puzzler, you're young (and wrong—so very, very wrong). If you know that *Q*bert* stars an eponymous foul-mouthed, uh, alien thingie (?) who hops about in an isometric field, avoiding bouncing balls, aggressive enemies with such literal names as Coily and Wrong-Way, and edges over which you'll fall to your death, then you are old. But you've also probably purchased this arcade classic already, which makes you wise as well.

Joust

ORIGINALLY RELEASED: 1982
GENRE: Action
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2

So get this: You're a knight. With a lance. Okay, makes sense…so far. The thing is, you're mounted on an ostrich. And you fly from platform to platform, all of which are perched precariously over a pit of lava, battling buzzard-mounted enemy knights who turn into eggs when you defeat them. Destroy the egg and you're golden, but let it survive too long and it'll hatch into an even more powerful foe. An exquisite control scheme helps make this 26-year-old surreal arcade gem a blast to play, even today.

Mortal Kombat II

ORIGINALLY RELEASED: 1993
GENRE: Fighting
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2

The best 2D *Mortal Kombat*—which, essentially, makes it the best *Mortal Kombat,* period—*MKII* refined the formula developed in the first game, with a host of wicked new Fatalities to shame your foes. A blast for button-mashers, with just barely enough depth to keep hardcore fighters happy, *MKII* is an over-the-top treat that'll take you back to a simpler time when cartoon violence was all it took to trigger Congressional ire. In fact, you can credit the first *Mortal Kombat* for the creation of the ESRB rating system! Play it for fun, or play it to find out what all the fuss was about. You'll be surprised at how tame (and absurdly funny) it all seems in retrospect.

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PlayStation POV

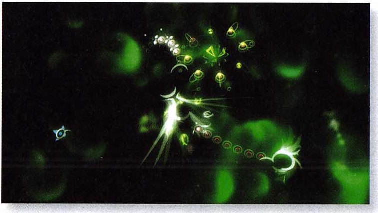
PLAYSTATION Network in '08

2008 is going to be a big year for the PLAYSTATION Network—you read it here first! Hi everyone, my name is Susan Panico and I am SCEA's senior director of PLAYSTATION Network. For those of you that own a PlayStation 3 or PSP (or both—what are you waiting for?) you have seen our online network evolve and expand over the past year. Last year, SCEA created a new organization focused solely on our PLAYSTATION Network business. The goal for this team is to create a center of excellence for online services and digital entertainment delivery. My role is to drive and oversee SCEA's network business strategy, operations, content strategy and marketing across all of our PSN services, including the PlayStation Store, PlayStation.com and PlayStation Home. Our goal is to take a consumer-centric approach to the user experience, and just as important, to provide the type of content that consumers expect from PlayStation. This is evident in the games we offer on the PS Store, like *flOw, Super Stardust HD, Calling All Cars,* and coming soon, *Little Big Planet.* Overall, we hang our hat on original content that can only be found on PLAYSTATION Network.

The best way to think about PLAYSTATION Network is as an online ecosystem that encourages you to establish an ongoing dialogue with us—one where your input is heard, valued, and acted upon. PlayStation.com, the PlayStation Blog (blog.playstation.com) and the PlayStation Store via the PC are further evidence of this commitment to our consumers. Over the course of this year, you will find new and exciting products and functionality that take full advantage of the different strengths of both PS3 and PSP. Of course, no discussion of our PLAYSTATION Network services would be complete without talking about Home. To say that Home is going to change the way you think about online communication and entertainment is a massive understatement. It puts a human face onto social networking, but in this case, the social structure is based on a common passion—games. It's made for gamers, by gamers. The initial goal for Home is to facilitate communication and enhance the game experience. Home allows people to strategize, launch into games, and come back into Home to talk about it. Its core value is a "For the people, of the people, by the people" philosophy and we want to achieve this in the most entertaining way possible. Plus, the application is free to download, so the consumer has everything to gain in a robust, 3D community. We'll be opening up the Home Beta to the public very soon and hope to see you there.

I encourage you to check out the wide variety of entertainment experiences to be had on the PLAYSTATION Network and, as always, let us know how we are doing.

Susan Panico, Senior Director of PLAYSTATION Network, SCEA



The developers of *flOw*, thatgamecompany, are hard at work on another artsy title, called *flower.*

Though more simplistic than high-budget titles, the games on the PS Store are innovative and addictive. Just look at *Super Stardust HD*!

WELCOME TO THE
PLAYSTATION Store

With a whole team devoted to PLAYSTATION Network, expect to see some cool upgrades, including a PlayStation Store revamp.

PLAYSTATION® Network

According to Panico, the PSN won't be just a store or a forum, it'll be an "online ecosystem" that fosters community.

David Jaffe, who was creative director of *God of War*, designed *Calling All Cars* for the PSN.

Next month

In PlayStation: The Official Magazine

Ah, summer. Usually a time when game magazines look foward to the holiday season half a year away. Not so for PTOM. June is proving to be a banner month for big releases, and we've got the exclusive review on what may be the very biggest game for the PS3 yet! And what game is that? Come back in 30 days to find out!

The fun doesn't stop there. We'll be racing to the finish line to give you the best coverage of **Gran Turismo 5 Prologue.** Even if you already know you want it, you'll still need to read our incredibly in-depth review for the full scoop on why it's just so gran(d)!

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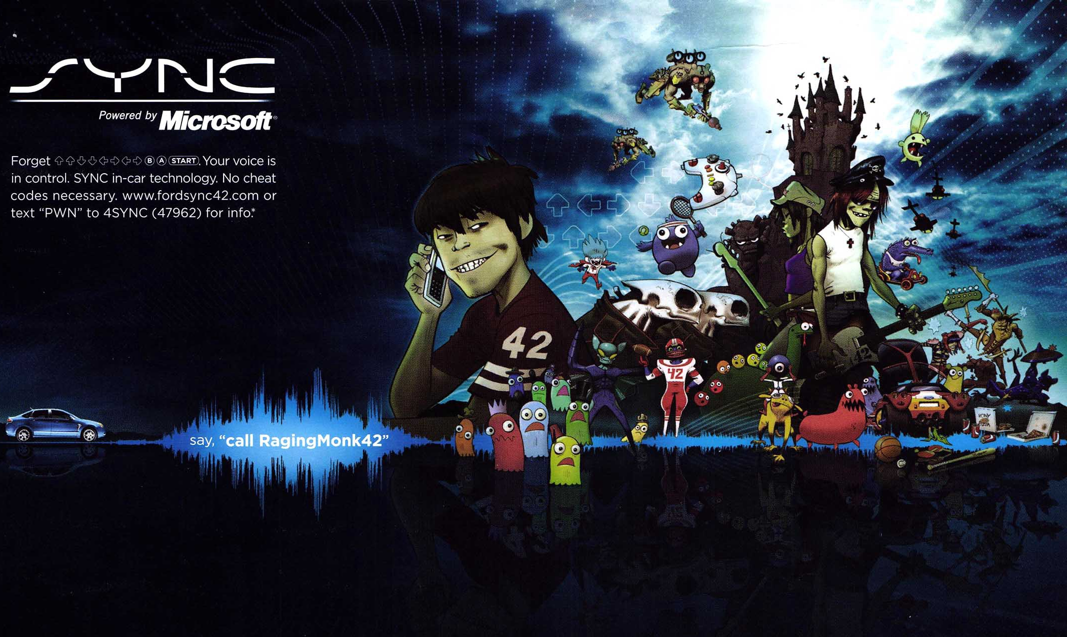

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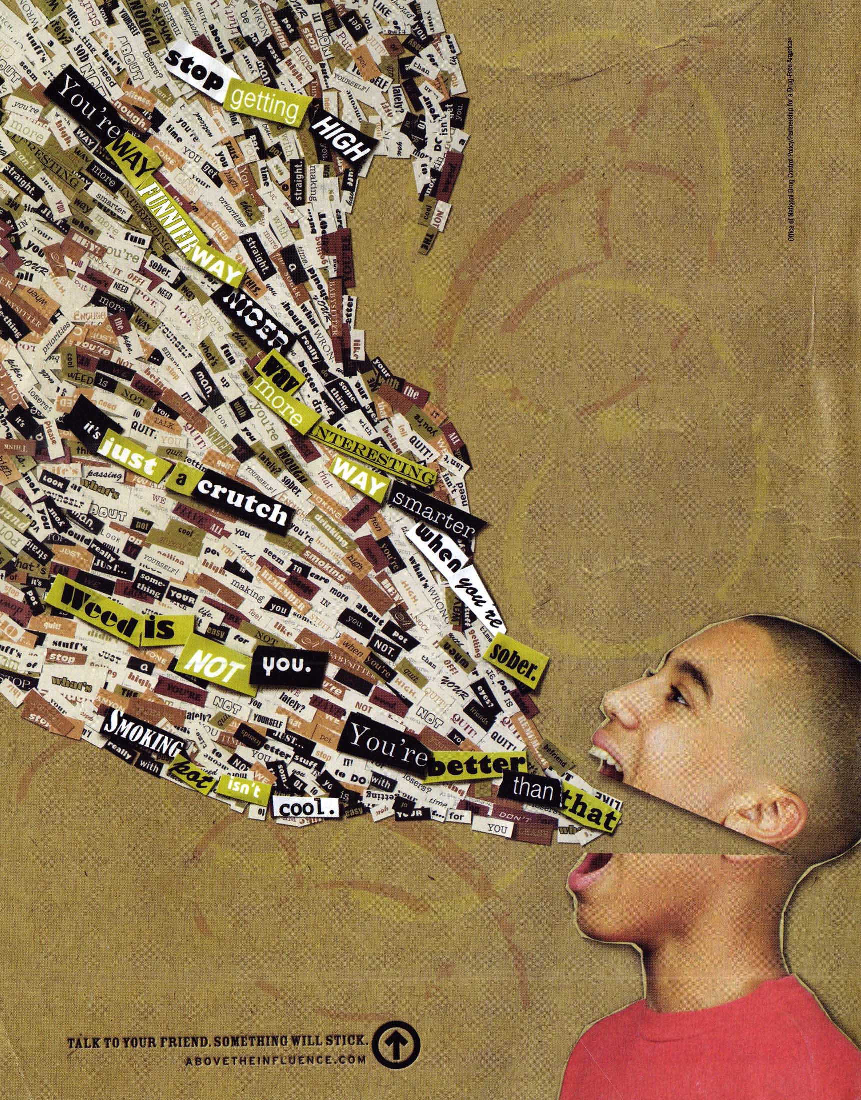
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